



# AMERICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Office of the President

January 3, 2019

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Chair, Committee on Science,  
Space, and Technology  
2306 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Ranking Member, Committee on Science,  
Space, and Technology  
2405 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Johnson and Ranking Member Lucas,

On behalf of the members of the American Astronomical Society (AAS), I write to strongly endorse the Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act of 2019 and to thank you both for your leadership on addressing the pervasive and harmful occurrence of sexual misconduct in the scientific community.

The legislation is responsive to recommendations from the consensus study report, *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in the Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine* from the National Academies. Implementing the report's recommendations is crucial to ensuring that science agencies and grantees adopt new sustainable, holistic, and evidence-based policies and practices that address the pervasive occurrence of sexual harassment in academia, its impact on individuals pursuing careers in STEM, and the integrity of the federal research enterprise.

In particular, the AAS strongly supports the following elements of the legislation, all of which are essential to system-wide changes necessary to prevent and effectively respond to sexual harassment:

- The establishment of a National Science Foundation program to support research and evaluation of interventions, including the examination of experiences of individuals of potentially intersecting underrepresented or vulnerable identities;
- The addition of sexual harassment to the *Responsible Conduct of Research* report;
- The call for the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to establish an interagency working group of science agencies to facilitate coordination;
- The call to develop uniform policy guidelines for science agencies for which the OSTP Director:
  - Includes guidelines that require grantees report findings of sexual harassment by grant personnel or placement of grant personnel on leave related to an investigation and enables regular sharing and archiving of reports between the agencies, and
  - Considers guidelines that require grantees assess organizational climate, assess and improve policies and procedures, and publish data and reward efforts to create a climate intolerant of harassment; and
- The plan to (re-)assess the influence of sexual harassment in academia and on STEM career advancement, implementation of policy guidelines, and where best to focus future efforts.

We do feel that the legislation would be strengthened by an additional direction that the OSTP director considers guidelines that diffuse the hierarchical and dependent relationships between trainees and faculty. Such attention to power-diffusion mechanisms is a recommendation of the National Academies report to reduce the risk of sexual harassment occurring. Diffusing the single-advisor structure brings further benefits to early career preparation, as also discussed in another recent National Academies report, *Graduate STEM Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Thank you again for your thoughtful attention to this important issue. The membership of the AAS stands ready to assist in any way we can. If there is anything we can do, please do not hesitate to contact either me or Dr. Joel Parriott, AAS Director of Public Policy, at [joel.parriott@aaas.org](mailto:joel.parriott@aaas.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Megan Donahue". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Megan Donahue, Ph.D.

President, American Astronomical Society