

November 15, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S- 230 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-221 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
H-204 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Representative Pelosi, Leader McConnell, and Senator Schumer:

With only a few weeks left before the 115th Congress ends, we urge you to quickly complete the bipartisan, bicameral discussions updating and strengthening the procedures for reporting and responding to discrimination and harassment in the legislative workforce, and to pass the strongest version of the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 Reform Act without delay.

More than a year ago, the #MeToo movement began a national reckoning about how our society and institutions address allegations of sexual harassment and assault. Brave individuals have shined a light on how institutions use power dynamics to silence survivors and ignore systemic problems involving inappropriate and, in some cases, illegal conduct. Since that time, powerful individuals have been held accountable for their actions, several institutions have implemented reforms, and some states have enacted legislative change. But there is still much work to do, including on Capitol Hill and within the Congressional workforce.

The Congressional Accountability Act (CAA) is almost 25 years old—and its flaws are well-known. While both chambers of Congress have taken several steps to address harassment and discrimination in congressional workspaces, the most meaningful and lasting reforms remain unfinished. The 30,000 individuals who comprise the legislative workforce and contribute to and support the work of Congress -- including those in Members' offices in Washington, DC and in the district and public safety officials who keep Members and the public safe from harm -- deserve to work with safety and respect.

Congress should pass a strong CAA reform bill that updates this critical law to provide a more equitable process for its workforce and to advance *real* transparency and accountability for Members of Congress. While the bill that the Senate passed in May represents an improvement over the status quo, it does not sufficiently address a number of important issues. We urge the House and the Senate to reach agreement on and pass a strong bill that includes the following provisions:

- *Free legal counsel should be available for the entire legislative workforce. A House-passed resolution already provides this important protection for its staffers.*
- *Mediation should be completely voluntary, meaning that it is provided on an opt in basis rather than an opt out basis.*
- *Any fact finding regarding a claim of harassment or discrimination against a Member should be conducted by an independent investigator, and should occur before the resolution of the claim, not after.*
- *Members of the Senate and House must be required to reimburse the Treasury for an award or settlement stemming from harassment or discrimination that they personally commit.*

We urge you to act now to send the strongest bipartisan reform bill to the President's desk before concluding the 115th Congress

For questions please contact Vania Leveille at the American Civil Liberties Union (vleveille@aclu.org), Joi Chaney at Equal Pay Today & Equal Rights Advocates (jchaney@equalpaytoday.org), June Zeitlin at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (zeitlin@civilrights.org), Maya Raghu at the National Women's Law Center (mraghu@nwlc.org), and Remington A. Gregg at Public Citizen (rgregg@citizen.org).

CC: Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives

Sincerely,

ACLU
 Equal Pay Today
 The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
 National Women's Law Center
 Public Citizen
 A Better Balance
 Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Inc.
 American Association of University Women (AAUW)
 American Atheists
 Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
 Chicago Workers' Collaborative
 Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
 Coalition of Labor Union Women
 Coalition on Human Needs
 Congress Too
 Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety
 Demand Progress
 Disciples Center for Public Witness
 Earthjustice

Edwards, Davis Stover & Associates
Equal Rights Advocates
Equality California
Feminist Majority
Futures Without Violence
Gender Justice
GovTrack.us
Hip Hop Caucus
Human Rights Campaign
Impact Fund
Jewish Women International
Justice for Migrant Women
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Legal Momentum
Mazzoni Center
MomsRising
MS Black Women's Roundtable and MS Women's Economic Security Initiative
NAACP
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network
National Employment Law Project
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Equality Action Team (NEAT)
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Oxfam America
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
PowHer New York
Senior Executives Association (SEA)
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
Southwest PA National Organization for Women
Southwest Women's Law Center
The Multiracial Activist
UltraViolet Action
Union for Reform Judaism
We Strategies
Women Employed
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's Law Project

Woodhull Freedom Foundation
Working IDEAL
YWCA USA