“As the father of two women, one of whom started college in the fall, this is an issue that is important to me as a father as well as a Senator. Our children should be focused on learning in a safe and productive environment, not about what dangers exist on their own campus. This legislation is an excellent, bipartisan step forward to helping make campuses a safer place. I’m thankful to Senator McCaskill, Senator Gillibrand and every member of our working group for their hard work on this bill,” said SEnator Dean Heller.

**Bipartisan Bill Takes Aim at Sexual Assault on Campuses, Protecting**

**Students, Boosting Accountability and Transparency at Colleges and Universities**

*Joined by survivors and advocates, bipartisan group of 8 Senators introduces* Campus Safety and Accountability Act

**WASHINGTON –** New, bipartisan legislation introduced Wednesday takes aim at sexual assaults on college and university campuses by protecting and empowering students, and strengthening accountability and transparency for institutions – including stiff penalties for non-compliance with the legislation’s new standards for training, data and best practices.

Amid troubling reports of cases of sexual violence at colleges and universities, the *Campus Safety and Accountability Act* was announced Wednesday by cosponsors Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), Dean Heller (R-Nev.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), Mark Warner (D-Va.), and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). The legislation is intended to confront a scourge of sexual violence against students, as available statistics show that approximately 19 percent of undergraduate women have been the victims of sexual assault. Because many crimes are not reported, that number could be substantially higher.

Several survivors and advocates joined the Senators and spoke in support of the legislation, including Annie Clark and Andrea Pino with “End Rape on Campus,” Anna a student survivor from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and Scott Berkowitz, president and founder of RAINN “Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network,” the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. The advocates were also joined by representatives of SAFER (Students Active for Ending Rape).

Currently, an American woman who attends college is more likely to be a victim of sexual assault than a woman who does not attend college. At the same time, institutions of higher education across the country seem to prefer not to acknowledge they have a problem for obvious public relations reasons. The current lax oversight of the federal laws on the books has the perverse effect of incentivizing colleges to encourage non-reporting, under-reporting, and non-compliance with the already weak standards under current federal law.

The bipartisan *Campus Accountability and Safety Act* will make it in the school’s immediate best interest to take proactive steps to protect their students and rid their campuses of sexual predators. The best way to accomplish this goal is through transparency and accountability to flip the incentives that currently reward keeping sexual assault in the shadows.

Provisions include of the bipartisan legislation include:

         New Campus Resources and Support Services for Student Survivors: Under this legislation, colleges and universities will be required to designate Confidential Advisors who will serve as a confidential resource for victims of crimes committed against a student. The role of Confidential Advisors will be to coordinate support services and accommodations for survivors, to provide information about options for reporting, and to provide guidance or assistance, at the direction of the survivor, in reporting the crime to campus authorities and/or local law enforcement. To encourage individuals to come forward with reports about sexual violence, schools will no longer be allowed to sanction a student who reveals a violation in good faith, such as underage drinking, in the process of reporting a sexual violence claim.

         Minimum Training Standards for On-Campus Personnel: Currently, a chronic lack of training of on-campus personnel hampers sexual assault investigations and the disciplinary process which often has resulted in negative outcomes for survivors. This legislation ensures that everyone from the Confidential Advisors, to those responsible for investigating and participating in disciplinary proceedings, will now receive specialized training that they have a firm understanding of the nature of these crimes and their effect on survivors.

         New Historic Transparency Requirements: For the first time, students at every university in America will be surveyed about their experience with sexual violence to get an accurate picture of this problem.  This new annual survey will be standardized and anonymous, with the results published online so that parents and high school students can make an informed choice when comparing universities. The Department of Education will also be required to publish the names of all schools with pending investigations, final resolutions, and voluntary resolution agreements related to Title IX.

         Campus Accountability and Coordination with Law Enforcement: All schools will now be required to use one uniform process for campus disciplinary proceedings and may no longer allow athletic departments or other subgroups to handle complaints of sexual violence for members of that subgroup alone. This legislation will require colleges and universities to enter into memoranda of understanding with all applicable local law enforcement agencies to clearly delineate responsibilities and share information so that when a crime occurs, both campus authorities and local authorities can focus on solving the crime rather than debating jurisdiction.

         Enforceable Title IX Penalties and Stiffer Penalties for Clery Act Violations: Schools that don’t comply with the certain requirements under the bill may face a penalty of up to 1% of the institution’s operating budget. Previously, the only allowable penalty was the loss of all financial aid which is not practical and has never been done. The bill increases penalties for Clery Act violations to up to $150,000 per violation from the current penalty of $35,000.

A 2000 Justice Department report estimated that less than 5 percent of victims of rape attending college report their attack. An investigative series from the non-profit, non-partisan Center for Public Integrity completed in 2010 found that in many cases, victims wishing to report sexual assault experienced confusion over how to report, confusion over acceptable standards of conduct and definitions of rape and sexual assault, and a fear of punishment for activities preceding some assaults, such as underage drinking.

According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Education, college campuses reported nearly 5,000 forcible sex offenses in 2012, putting college women at a higher risk for sexual assault than their non-college bound peers.

The Department of Education handles laws covering sexual assault on campus. Title IX, a federal gender equity law, requires colleges and universities to respond to sexual assault and harassment cases on campus and have policies in place to help prevent such incidents. The Jeanne Clery Act mandates that colleges and universities must report information on crime on and around campuses and provide victims with select rights and resources. Under the Clery Act, colleges and universities can be fined for violations or made ineligible from participating in federal student financial aid programs.

The Senators have been working together for months to examine federal, state, and local policies, collect feedback from stakeholders, and craft bipartisan legislation to better protect and empower students, and hold both perpetrators and institutions accountable.

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