

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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AG Balderas, AG Shapiro & 18 AGs Call on Secretary DeVos to Maintain Protections for Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault

AG Balderas: "Secretary DeVos and the Trump Administration cannot continue to put students in danger by considering harmful rollbacks that will weaken fundamental protections afforded under Title IX. Violence on America's campuses must be taken seriously."

AG Shapiro: "We're calling on Secretary DeVos to listen to law enforcement and trust survivors of sexual assault by keeping these protections in place and putting student safety first."

Albuquerque, NM - Today, New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro and 18 Attorneys General sent a letter to Education Secretary Betsy DeVos expressing their concern over reports the Department of Education is preparing to roll back important protections for survivors of sexual assault on college campuses and urging her to keep these protections in place. The Attorneys General also called on Secretary DeVos to work collaboratively with them to take action to end the scourge of sexual violence on our campuses.

"Secretary DeVos and the Trump Administration cannot continue to put students in danger by considering harmful rollbacks that will weaken fundamental protections afforded under Title IX. Violence on America's campuses must be taken seriously," said **Attorney General of New Mexico Hector Balderas**, the letter's co-author.

“We’re calling on Secretary DeVos to listen to law enforcement and trust survivors of sexual assault by keeping these protections in place and putting student safety first,” said **Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro**, lead author of the letter.

Balderas continued: “In New Mexico, we are working with our institutions of higher learning to improve reporting trends, reduce sexual assaults, and make our students safer. We cannot afford to turn back the clock on the progress states are making because of poor decisions made by the Trump Administration.”

In March, **Attorney General Hector Balderas** announced the launch of his office’s statewide Conscious Campus initiative. The educational initiative aims to help college communities discuss the realities of sexual assault on campus, explore interventions, and benefit from community resources. So far this year, Central New Mexico Community College, Eastern New Mexico University, New Mexico Highlands University and New Mexico State University have participated in **Attorney General Balderas’** program to combat sexual violence on campus.

Incidents of sexual assault on college campuses are widespread. The U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics found that, on average, 20.5 percent of college women had experienced sexual assault since entering college while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one in five women experienced sexual assault in their lifetimes. Moreover, the vast majority of these incidents go unreported. According to a study from the American Association of Universities, reporting rates for some types of assaults were as low as five percent, in part due to survivors’ concerns about coming forward.

The Department of Education’s current guidance was first issued in 2011 and later clarified in 2014. The guidance instructs colleges on how they must address sexual assault incidents under Title IX. These steps include appointing a Title IX coordinator, requiring mandatory reporting by responsible school officials, and implementing procedures for handling investigations and hearings.

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education’s Title IX tracker, as of July 9, 2017 there have been 408 investigations of colleges for their handling of reports of sexual violence, 64 of those have been resolved and 344 remain open.

Of particular concern to the Attorneys General were the comments from Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Candice Jackson, who claimed that 90 percent of campus sexual assault allegations “fall into the category of ‘we were both drunk,’ ‘we broke up, and six months later I found myself under a Title IX investigation because she just decided that our last sleeping together was not quite right.’”

The letter reaffirmed the Attorneys General’s commitment to working collaboratively with Secretary DeVos and the Department of Education to address the problem of sexual assault, including suggesting the Secretary engage with a bipartisan group of Attorneys General and other stakeholders to discuss collaboration.

In addition to **Attorneys General Balderas and Shapiro**, the other 18 Attorneys General signing on to the letter to Secretary DeVos are: California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, Connecticut Attorney General George Jepsen, Delaware Attorney General Matthew Denn, District of Columbia Attorney General Karl Racine, Hawaii Attorney General Doug Chin, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller, Kentucky Attorney General Andy Beshear, Maine Attorney General Janet Mills, Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Kilmartin, Vermont Attorney General TJ Donovan, and Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring.

Please see attached for a copy of the letter that was sent today.

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STATE OF NEW MEXICO
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL



HECTOR H. BALDERAS
ATTORNEY GENERAL

July 19, 2017

The Honorable Elisabeth DeVos
Secretary
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

We are writing to express our serious concern over reports that your office is preparing to roll back important protections for survivors of sexual assault on college campuses.

As Attorneys General, we see the impact campus sexual assault has on survivors, educational institutions, and our communities. Incidents of sexual assault on colleges and universities are widespread: the American Association of Universities (AAU) has found that 23 percent of female undergraduates were the victims of sexual assault or sexual misconduct due to physical force, threats of force, or incapacitation.¹ The federal government's own studies have reached similar conclusions: the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics found that, on average, 20.5% of college women had experienced sexual assault since entering college² while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one in five of women experienced sexual assault in her lifetime.³ Moreover, the vast majority of these incidents go unreported. In fact, the AAU study concluded that reporting rates for some types of assaults were as low as 5 percent, in part due to survivors' concerns about coming forward.

Thanks to the tireless work of survivors and advocates, our nation is beginning to understand the full scope of this epidemic. The Department of Education's current guidance reaffirms the obligation of colleges and universities to protect survivors of sexual assault. Among other provisions, the guidance reaffirms that Title IX requires institutions to use a

¹ AAU Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct (2015), <https://www.aau.edu/key-issues/aau-climate-survey-sexual-assault-and-sexual-misconduct-2015>.

² Campus Climate Survey Validation Study, Final Technical Report, Appx. E, https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/App_E_Sex-Assault-Rape-Battery.pdf.

³ National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf.

“preponderance of the evidence” standard in investigating allegations of sexual harassment or domestic violence. While we recognize that there is a great deal more that can be done to protect students and agree on the importance of ensuring that investigations are conducted fairly, a rushed, poorly-considered effort to roll back current policies sends precisely the wrong message to all students. Yet there is every indication that is exactly the approach your Department is taking.

In particular, we were deeply troubled by the comments attributed to Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Candice Jackson, who claimed that ninety percent of campus sexual assault allegations “fall into the category of ‘we were both drunk,’ ‘we broke up, and six months later I found myself under a Title IX investigation because she just decided that our last sleeping together was not quite right’.” While we appreciate that Ms. Jackson has issued an apology, her comments communicate to survivors of campus sexual assault that the Department does not take their concerns seriously and that it is not committed to continuing its current efforts to combat this epidemic on our college campuses. Coming on the heels of news that she has directed the Office for Civil Rights to reduce its efforts to identify systematic problems in conducting investigations, we have serious concerns as to whether Ms. Jackson can be entrusted to oversee a fair, thorough process in evaluating the Department’s policies in this area.

Despite our concerns, we are committed to working collaboratively with your Department to address the problem of sexual assault on America’s college campuses. But any effort in this area must be deliberate and allow for meaningful input from all stakeholders, and it must focus on the ultimate goal of ensuring that all students are protected from discrimination, including sexual harassment, assault, stalking and domestic violence, under Title IX. To that end, we urge you to directly engage with a broad, representative group of stakeholders, including survivors, victims’ rights advocates, law enforcement, and a bipartisan group of Attorneys General from around the country, so we can take action together to end the scourge of sexual violence on our college and university campuses. Furthermore, we urge you to continue to implement and uphold these important civil rights protections so that all students are able to learn in a safe environment free from violence and discrimination.

We stand ready to partner with you in this effort and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



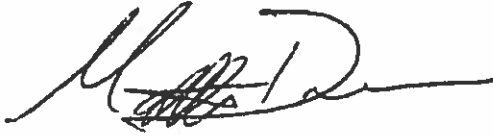
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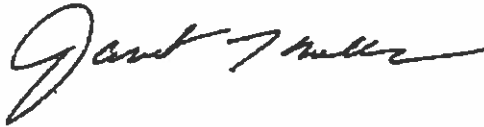
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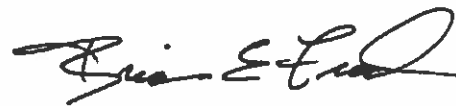
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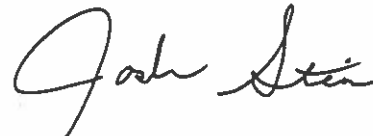
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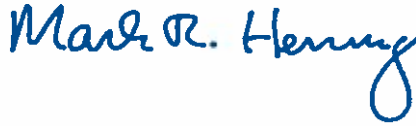
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