



MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
**GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL**

**Statement on Resolve creating a task force on sexual misconduct climate surveys for colleges and universities in Massachusetts**

H.4159, entitled *Resolve creating a task force on sexual misconduct climate surveys for colleges and universities in Massachusetts*, was reported out of the Joint Committee on Higher Education on January 31, 2018. It is based on H.2998, which was introduced by Rep. Lori A. Ehrlich and 20 co-petitioners on January 20, 2017. It establishes a task force on sexual misconduct climate surveys to determine the prevalence and perception of sexual misconduct at Massachusetts colleges and universities, providing those institutions with the data to tackle these issues effectively and increasing awareness to help drive cultural change.

The MIT Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,900 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their welfare, academic opportunities, and overall health. We support all measures that effectively prevent sexual harassment and assault and provide resources and support for survivors. Therefore, we support H.4159.

In the fall of 2014, MIT released the results of its own Community Attitudes on Sexual Assault (CASA) survey<sup>1</sup>. According to Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart, the key takeaways were (a) the need for better awareness of and access to support resources and reporting options, (b) effective response from these support resources and reporting options, and (c) the need to change attitudes and behaviors. The survey allowed MIT to take informed actions, including requiring mandatory sexual misconduct training for every member of the MIT community and updating policies and procedures concerning harassment. Evidence of progress can be measured by higher caseload due to improved education and outreach, robust engagement towards creating a safer and more inclusive campus, and increased peer-to-peer respect<sup>2,3</sup>. MIT's CASA survey addressed topics similar to those included in the model climate survey that would be developed by the diverse task force formed by H.4159. Therefore, we expect the widespread implementation of community climate surveys as mandated by H.4159 would allow other Massachusetts universities to see similar benefits.

While H.4159 as-is would be an important one time step, we believe that two amendments to H.4159 would increase the climate survey's efficacy. First, the survey should be issued periodically to detect changes in campus culture over time. Therefore, providing a specification of periodicity (e.g. surveys must be issued no less frequently than every three years) would ensure prolonged monitoring of the prevalence and perception of sexual misconduct at colleges and universities. Second, the results of each higher-education institution's survey should be reported to the Commissioner of Higher Education, thus allowing for increased accountability. These two amendments would enable H.4159 to have an even greater impact statewide.

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<sup>1</sup> "Survey Results: 2014 Community Attitudes on Sexual Assault", MIT Office of the Chancellor (2014)

<sup>2</sup> "3Q: Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart on efforts to combat sexual assault", MIT News Office (2017)

<sup>3</sup> "Letter regarding MIT's efforts in combating sexual harassment", MIT News Office (2017)



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We urge the Massachusetts General Court to pass H.4159, and consider the above amendments. The passage of H.4159 would allow post-secondary institutions to gather information about the sexual misconduct climate in their community and make informed decisions based on the results. The suggested amendments would allow for comparisons across institutions and over time. This process would allow for improved policies and practices surrounding sexual misconduct, as well as increased community awareness to drive cultural change. We thank the sponsors of H.4159 for their attention to this issue and urge all members of the legislature to support this bill.

*Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council. April 2018.*