



MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

Statement on Policies that Prevent Sexual Harassment and Assault

The MIT Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,800 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, provide resources and support for survivors, and result in fair and timely investigations with appropriate consequences for perpetrators.

Sexual misconduct is an important issue nationwide. Nationally, 18% of female students and 4% of male students have reported experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact on campus.¹ These concerning trends must be addressed in order to create a safe campus environment for all students and promote equal access to education, both of which are essential for maximizing the potential of young people.

We therefore thank all parties involved in the passage of the Survivor's Bill of Rights Act (H.R.5578), which facilitates medical forensic examination for victims of sexual assault, eases the collection, processing, and preservation of evidence and tasks the Department of Justice with developing and disseminating best practices for handling sexual assault cases.

While the passage of the Survivor's Bill of Rights represents an important step, open challenges remain with respect to reporting sexual assault and gender-based discrimination. Although 63% of MIT students who indicated they had an unwanted sexual experience at MIT told someone else about the incident, fewer than 5% reported the experience(s) to someone in an official capacity.² Furthermore, 44% of MIT students report that they were intoxicated while experiencing or witnessing sexual assault, which indicates a significant barrier to report to police.³ These challenges persist at universities across the country.

Thus, there is a pressing need for effective laws that protect whistleblowers of sexual assault, especially on college campuses. MIT has recently updated its Good Samaritan Amnesty Policy to protect students and student organizations from disciplinary action when they seek help regarding medical emergencies or serious violations of MIT policy, including sexual misconduct,^{4,5} and we believe this policy will have a positive impact on student wellbeing on our campus. In order to codify similar protections into the law across the country, **we would support the re-introduction and passage of H.R. 5972 Campus Sexual Assault Whistleblower Protection Act** (114th Congress).

Another unaddressed barrier to reporting sexual assault and gender-based discrimination is the lack of policies that guarantee transparency in the reporting and prosecution of principal investigators at institution of higher education. The renowned journal, *Nature*, recently declared the policies and procedures of research universities to be weighted towards protecting powerful faculty members at the expense of students and young researchers.

¹ "Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct", Westat, xiv (2015)² National Science Foundation 2017 report on Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering, p.7

² "Survey Results: 2014 Community Attitudes on Sexual Assault", MIT Office of the Chancellor, 6 (2014)

³ "Survey Results: 2014 Community Attitudes on Sexual Assault", MIT Office of the Chancellor, 5 (2014)

⁴ "Good Samaritan Amnesty Policy will now apply to prohibited substances", MIT News, 25 August 2016. <http://news.mit.edu/2016/new-good-samaritan-amnesty-policy-will-apply-to-prohibited-substances-0825>

⁵ MIT Good Samaritan Amnesty Policy. http://handbook.mit.edu/helpseeking#_ftn2



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These tendencies are dangerous as they not only protect perpetrators but also drive young promising female researchers out of the historically male-dominated STEM-based fields. We would support policies that offer solutions to this problem by holding universities accountable for reporting these incidents to relevant external organizations and ensuring that cases are handled in an appropriate and timely manner.

We thank the members of Congress who continue to dedicate their attention to making college campuses safer by lowering barriers to reporting sexual assault and facilitating the prosecution of perpetrators.

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