



News Release

Purple Campaign President Applauds the Senate for Unanimously Passing Bipartisan Sexual Harassment Reform Legislation

Steele, who personally experienced sexual harassment on Capitol Hill as an 18-year-old intern, says the bill's passage is a "historic win for victims of sexual misconduct everywhere."

WASHINGTON D.C., May 24, 2018 - Purple Campaign President Ally Coll Steele applauded the U.S. Senate for unanimously passing the Congressional Accountability Reform Act today. The Purple Campaign has been an active partner in pushing for the reform of sexual assault and harassment policies in Congress and workplaces across the country.

"I am grateful to the U.S. Senate for reaching a bipartisan agreement and unanimously passing the Congressional Accountability Reform Act today. This is a monumental step in the right direction and represents real progress toward creating lasting change out of the #MeToo movement.

I approach this issue not only as the President of the Purple Campaign, but also from the perspective of a former Hill staffer who personally experienced sexual harassment as an 18-year-old Senate intern. Last fall, I shared my story for the first time with the Washington Post in an [article](#) that exposed Congress's backwards approach to sexual harassment. It was a difficult decision, but I ultimately did so not to seek retribution for what happened to me over a decade ago, but because I hoped it would make a difference for future generations of women who aspire to work on Capitol Hill.

I could never have anticipated what happened next. In the days after the article was published, women in Congress started [speaking up](#) about their own experiences with sexual harassment, and called on their colleagues to act. Two weeks later, more than 1,500 current and former Hill staffers wrote a [letter](#) urging reform. Together, these events prompted the introduction of the bipartisan legislation that has now passed both chambers of Congress.

This is not the bill I would have written, and it falls short of providing the resources and protections I believe victims of misconduct deserve. I am especially disappointed that, unlike the House version, the Senate bill fails to provide legal representation for claimants. As an attorney myself, I know that counsel plays a critical in resolving any

dispute -- but that is especially true when, as here, claimants are alleging a violation that often strips individuals of their dignity and leaves them vulnerable to retaliation. I urge lawmakers to work to address both these issues and those [raised](#) by allied advocacy groups as they finalize the legislation.

But this is nonetheless a historic win for victims of sexual misconduct everywhere. Both versions of the bill make long-overdue reforms that will undoubtedly improve the culture on Capitol Hill and set a new standard for workplaces across America. And now that Congress has made progress on cleaning up its own house, federal lawmakers can turn to addressing the issue across American workplaces. I look forward to working with our growing Purple Campaign coalition to keep the momentum going.”

Key Improvements in the Senate Congressional Accountability Reform Act

- **Ends mandatory mediation for sexual harassment complaints.** While many will still prefer to resolve their claims through the less adversarial mediation process, it is critical that victims have a choice about how they resolve their claims. The existing rules require claimants to go through a mandatory 30-day mediation proceeding before they can pursue other options. This bill allows victims to opt-out of mediation immediately.
- **Extends the time to file a claim from 45 to 90 days.** This is an important change that allows claimants more time to understand their options, process what they have experienced, and to seek advice from others they trust before making a decision about whether to file a formal complaint.
- **Allows victims to immediately request a formal hearing or file a civil lawsuit.** Under the status quo, victims are required to go through a mandatory 30-day “cooling off period” before they can pursue further action. This bill allows claimants to elect to immediately request a formal hearing or to file a civil lawsuit.
- **Allows victims to share their experiences with others.** The bill includes a rule of construction to clarify that employees are permitted to disclose factual information related to a claim without violating Congressional rules.
- **Extends protections to unpaid staff and district offices.** It’s critical to ensure that any sexual harassment policy applies to those who are most vulnerable to both harassment and retaliation for reporting. This bill extends protections to unpaid staff, including interns, fellows, and detailees, as well as to staff in District offices, who often have reduced access to information and resources than do paid staffers in Washington D.C.
- **Holds members accountable.** The bill creates important accountability mechanisms by requiring members of Congress to repay awards and settlements stemming from acts of harassment they personally commit, including through wage garnishment if necessary.

- **Creates transparency.** The bill requires public reporting of awards and settlements, including identifying if a member of Congress has properly reimbursed the Treasury for settlements. It also provides for a staff survey of each Congress to examine the workplace culture on Capitol Hill.
- **Sanctions for Counsel:** The bill includes sanctions for lawyers who violate the standards for representation in proceedings. This helps create accountability to ensure that defense lawyers don't treat victims unfairly in the process.

For more information about the Purple Campaign's efforts to push for the Congressional Accountability Reform Act, please visit: <https://www.purplecampaign.org/take-action-caa>

ABOUT THE PURPLE CAMPAIGN

The Purple Campaign (www.purplecampaign.org) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to end the systemic problem of workplace sexual harassment that exists across every industry in America. Founded by two bicoastal millennial women -- a lawyer and politico based in Washington D.C., and a tech-industry business leader based in San Francisco, CA -- the organization is working to create better corporate policies, establish better laws, and empower people to create change in their own workplaces and communities.

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