

September 20, 2018

Hon. Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

Hon. Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate

Hon. Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

RE: **Harassment, Discrimination, and Reform in Congress**

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Representative Pelosi, and Senator Schumer:

We are former congressional staffers who, like so many before us and since, arrived on Capitol Hill with big dreams and excited to be a part of the improbable story of America. But each of us was harassed or assaulted while working for members of the United States Congress.

We hoped that our experiences – and those of many more who remain nameless – would spur Congress to fundamentally reform the deeply flawed system it now uses to address claims of harassment and discrimination. But it has been nearly one year since the #MeToo movement shed needed light on the prevalence of harassment and assault in our workplaces and yet no legislation has become law. We are dismayed and disheartened by Congress's failure to act and take care of its own.

We write to remind you, and every member of the 115th Congress, not only of the pain we suffered, but also of the shame and humiliation that current staffers must bear when they too are victimized by harmful and discriminatory actions from a member of Congress, a supervisor, or a colleague. And for staffers courageous enough to speak out, this pain is compounded by having to navigate an antiquated, unfair, and traumatizing dispute resolution system that Congress currently uses to address harassment and discrimination. Something must be done.

In every building, down every hallway, and behind every door in Congress are good, honest people – often young people – working long hours for little pay in hopes of making our country and the world fairer and more just. And they have chosen to do so for and with you. It is impossible to describe how meaningful it is to work there.

But for too many of us, the work was tainted by harassment and abuse nurtured by a culture of secrecy and an unforgiving, flawed system that protects those in power rather than those who need protection most. This included sexual harassment, verbal beratement, public humiliation, being punched, being grabbed, being threatened. And in every instance, our current jobs and future careers in politics were integrally tied to our willingness to stay quiet.

These true stories of harassment, abuse, and discrimination are a stain on the institution we love and have profoundly changed the lives of those who experienced them. After each of us came forward, we were met with countless, heartbreaking stories from current staffers with similar experiences, and we know that many, many more stories still remain untold.

It is not their burden to bring about change. It is yours. You were elected to lead.

The 115th Congress must act now to effectively address the scourge of harassment and discrimination in its own workforce. It has been almost one year since multiple claims of sexual harassment in Congress were made public, 7 months since the House passed its reform bill, and almost 4 months since the Senate did the same.

Time is running out, but there is something you can do – right now.

We implore you, on behalf of ourselves and so many others who are unable to come forward, to complete the work already started and pass the strongest bill possible that will meaningfully reform the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995. Such reforms would include holding Members truly accountable – and without loopholes – for the harassment and discrimination they personally commit; and addressing the inherent power imbalance in congressional offices by, for example, ensuring legal assistance to individuals who allege discrimination and allowing them to opt in, rather than opt out, of mediation.

We call on you to ensure that a bill with these and other necessary reforms is passed before the end of this work period.

Sincerely yours,

Anna Kain

Rebecca Weir

Ally Coll Steele

Katherine Cichy

Winsome Packer

Melanie Sloan

Lauren Greene

CC: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
Members of the U.S. Senate