



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

January 27, 2020

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) Committee  
628 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Ranking Member Murray:

**The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students is pleased to endorse Bringing an End to Harassment by Enhancing Accountability and Rejecting Discrimination in the Workplace Act (BE HEARD in the Workplace Act, S.1082).** This bill goes a long way to add protections for graduate students as employees in notoriously precarious situations. Gender and racial discrimination in academia is well-documented, ranging from student course evaluations that demonstrate gender and racial biases all the way up the pipeline to the gender and racial disparities at the highest echelons of academic departments and institutions of higher learning more broadly.

Furthermore, academic settings are often breeding grounds for toxic environments in which harassment runs rampant and, significantly, unchecked, with perpetrators not held accountable even after multiple offenses. Compounding the problem is the fact that graduate students are often unable to a) leave their work environment since their employment overlaps significantly with their own research, or b) report discrimination or harassment due to fear of various forms of retaliation. Although not it does not alleviate the situation in the moment of harassment, extending the statutes of limitations (Sec. 207) does provide graduate students the opportunity to report workplace abuse after graduation, thereby potentially limiting future transgressions.

We laud the pragmatic steps outlined in the BE HEARD in the Workplace Act, particularly those pertaining to training as well as those that foster deeper understandings of workplace harassment at the local level (through employment climate assessments, Sec. 106) and at the national level (through continued research on the topic, Sec. 111-113). Clarification on standards of proof (Sec. 204-205) is also helpful since the burden of such demonstrations is often unfairly placed on the victim.

Workplace harassment contributes significantly to the inhospitable academic employment environments that, in turn, have detrimental effects on graduate student mental health—indeed, graduate students are no less than six times more likely to suffer from moderate to severe depression and anxiety than the general population. A particularly striking example of the horrific consequences of toxic workplace environments in academia is evidenced by the tragic death by suicide of John Brady, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in 2019.



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**We, therefore, commend the BE HEARD in the Workplace Act for providing accountability structures that serve to shield graduate student employees from at least some of the harmful practices that dominate our day-to-day work: teaching the leaders of tomorrow, conducting world-leading research, and driving American intellectual advancement and innovation. We also urge Congress to continue to address this issue until workplace harassment and intimidation are no longer impediments to academic labor.** If we can be a further resource to you or your staff as you consider this and other issues related to graduate education, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Mike Ford  
Director of Legislative Affairs  
[legislative@nagps.org](mailto:legislative@nagps.org)  
PhD Candidate, Columbia University

Gwen Chodur  
Director of Social Justice Concerns  
[sjc@nagps.org](mailto:sjc@nagps.org)  
PhD Candidate, University of California, Davis

Alex Seto  
Director of Employment Concerns  
[dec@nagps.org](mailto:dec@nagps.org)  
PhD Student, Purdue University

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students  
1050 K Street, NW #400  
Washington, DC, 20001  
[www.nagps.org](http://www.nagps.org)

**Cc:**

Senator Kamala Harris  
Senator Jeff Merkley  
Senator Elizabeth Warren  
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
Senator Richard Blumenthal  
Senator Tammy Baldwin  
Senator Robert Casey Jr.  
Senator Bernard Sanders  
Senator Tim Kaine

Senator Sherrod Brown  
Senator Edward Markey  
Senator Jacky Rosen  
Senator Amy Klobuchar  
Senator Benjamin Cardin  
Senator Chris Van Hollen  
Senator Cory Booker  
Senator Richard Durbin  
Senator Tammy Duckworth