



IWV Supports the Congressional Accountability and Hush Fund Elimination Act

November 30, 2017

Dear Members of Congress,

On behalf of Independent Women's Voice, a 501(c)(4) organization for mainstream women, men and families, I am writing this letter in support of the Congressional Accountability and Hush Fund Elimination Act introduced by Rep. Ron DeSantis (R-FL-06), Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN-07), Rep. Jim Cooper (D-TN-02), Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI-02), and Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY-04). This bipartisan legislation seeks to put an end to sexual harassment/assault by Members of Congress and staff, empower victims, and eliminate the taxpayer-funded hush fund being used to settle such claims.

Sexual harassment and assault are always wrong no matter what industry or what side of the aisle. Any accusation should be treated with seriousness, and known offenders must be punished to the fullest extent of the law. However, in the case of sexual harassment/assault on Capitol Hill, lawmakers and Congressional staff don't face the same rules as people in the private sector. Complainants must go through a long and arduous process, including mandatory counseling and other waiting periods before filing suit, and when settlements are made in favor of complainants, the money doesn't come from the individual lawmaker's office or campaign funds, but from a taxpayer-funded congressional hush fund managed through Congress' Office of Compliance. In fact, according to the Office of Compliance, between 1997 and 2017, the U.S. Treasury has paid \$17.2 million in awards and settlements for Capitol Hill workplace violations.

Of course we understand that sadly, in the political realm, there may be politically-motivated accusations against innocent lawmakers or candidates. This is ultimately most harmful to real victims, and we support justice and due process for both victims and the accused.

However, the American people deserve more transparency about the current treatment of sexual harassment complaints on Capitol Hill, and reforms should hold lawmakers personally accountable for the workplace culture in their offices when there is evidence of wrongdoing. Furthermore, no one should draw on a taxpayer-funded account to pay settlements or awards. This is simply unfair.

The Congressional Accountability and Hush Fund Elimination Act will address this unfairness and change how sexual harassment/assault allegations are reported and resolved. Specifically, the legislation will:

- prohibit the use of public funds to pay settlements or awards for sexual harassment or assault claims against Members of Congress and staff;
- disclose all payments previously made by the Office of Compliance within 30 days;
- require perpetrators of sexual harassment/assault to reimburse the U.S. Treasury with interest;
- prohibit requirement of nondisclosure agreements as a precondition; and
- allow victims of sexual harassment or assault to make public statements about their claim, regardless of nondisclosure agreements.

Consequently, this will bring much-needed transparency and justice to Capitol Hill.

Independent Women's Voice applauds Representatives Ron DeSantis, Marsha Blackburn, Jim Cooper, Tulsi Gabbard, and Kathleen Rice for their leadership on this important issue and strongly urges other Members of Congress to support the Congressional Accountability and Hush Fund Elimination Act.

Respectfully,



Hadley Heath Manning

Director of Policy

Independent Women's Forum