



Boston Federation Of Graduate Student Governments

Statement in Support of Legislation to Reduce Sexual Misconduct on Higher Education Campuses

Sexual misconduct is an important issue facing institutions of higher education globally. Nationally, 18% of female students and 4% of male students have experienced nonconsensual sexual contact on campus.¹ Addressing these concerning trends is critical for creating safe campus environments for all students and promoting equal access to education. The Boston Federation of Graduate Student Governments represents the over 23,000 graduate students at our seven member universities: Babson, Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis, MIT, Tufts, and UMass Boston. We are dedicated to supporting 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. **We therefore strongly support H.1208/S.736, entitled *An Act requiring sexual misconduct climate surveys at institutions of higher education* and S.764/H.1209, entitled *An Act relative to sexual violence on higher education campuses*.**

Both H.1208/S.736 and S.764/H.1209 are in their third iteration since being originally filed in 2015. H.1208/S.736 requires all Massachusetts colleges and universities to administer a sexual misconduct climate survey every two years to determine the prevalence and perception of sexual misconduct on campus, providing those institutions with the data to tackle these issues effectively and increasing awareness to help drive cultural change. It also convenes a task force that will draft a model survey that colleges and universities can use if they do not draft their own. S.764/H.1209 requires that degree-granting post-secondary institutions adopt a policy regarding dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, and make it available to all students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, it adds requirements that aim to reduce instances of sexual violence through training of students, faculty, and staff; make it easier, safer, and more private to report instances of sexual violence; and provide a clear pathway to resolution of reported instances. We believe that both these pieces of legislation are important steps towards reducing the prevalence of sexual misconduct of campuses and changing perspectives on the issue, thus making higher education more safe and accessible for all students.

Of our member institutions, four (Brandeis, BU, MIT, and Tufts) have had success with conducting sexual misconduct climate surveys in the past. According to MIT Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart, the key takeaways of MIT's 2014 survey were (a) the need for better awareness of and access to support resources and reporting options, (b) effective response from these support resources and reporting options, and (c) the need to change attitudes and behaviors.² These sentiments have been echoed by other universities.^{3,4} Brandeis's then-interim president Lisa Lynch stated that their "survey shows us how much more we still need to do" and that the university will "use these data to improve the university's current practices."⁴ These surveys have helped universities to identify and bring issues of sexual misconduct to light, and use the collected data to take informed actions. All four of these institutions have stated their intentions to repeat these surveys as a way to track the progress of their updated policies regarding sexual misconduct; this year, both MIT and Boston University have already begun to conduct their second iteration of these surveys. UMass Boston has also included questions about sexual misconduct in a student life survey recently sent to students.

While these surveys have been met with success at many universities, not all universities currently conduct such surveys. By creating a task force to develop similar surveys and requiring implementation of such surveys, H.1208/S.736 would allow other Massachusetts universities to see similar benefits. In addition, by standardizing surveys across institutions and requiring the results of such surveys to be public, this legislation would make it easier for students to compare statistics between schools when deciding where to attend and encourage colleges and universities to enact policies to reduce instances of sexual misconduct on their campuses.

S.764/H.1209 would also help to change the culture around sexual violence on college campuses by clarifying institutional policies on sexual violence, requiring training on sexual violence, and lowering the



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barriers for reporting. The problem of sexual violence and misconduct on university campuses deeply affects our communities: of the schools we represent with available data, 8-22% of total students (undergraduate and graduate) have experienced some form of sexual assault while on campus.^{2,5} Of students who indicated they had an unwanted sexual experience on campus, less than 6% reported the experience(s) to someone in an official capacity.^{2,5} This indicates a significant barrier to report to authorities. S.764/H.1209, with its requirements for post-secondary institutions to establish anonymous and off-campus reporting alternatives along with protections for witnesses who help with an investigation, is a step towards reducing that barrier.

By addressing the issue of sexual misconduct on campus, both of these bills would result in a safer graduate student experience, more support for women in underrepresented fields, and overall higher quality of life and productivity for the graduate student body. **We thus strongly support H.1208/S.736 and S.764/H.1209 and urge all members of the legislature to support this bill.**

1. [“Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct”](#), Westat, xiv (2015)
2. [“Survey Results: 2014 Community Attitudes on Sexual Assault”](#), MIT Office of the Chancellor (2014)
3. [Boston University Climate Survey Task Force Executive Report, Introductory Memo](#) (2015)
4. [Brandeis Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Misconduct](#) (2015)
5. [Tufts Attitudes About Sexual Conduct Survey](#) (2017)

Prepared by MIT's GSC on behalf of the Boston Federation of Graduate Student Governments. (April 2019)