



National Alliance to  
End Sexual Violence

## **Campus Sexual Assault Response: Key Issues**

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Survivors of campus sexual assault suffer high rates of PTSD, depression, and drug or alcohol abuse, which can hamper both their ability to succeed in school and future employment. Several studies confirmed high incidence of campus sexual assault, yet only a small percentage of these cases are reported, sanctioned by campus judicial boards, or prosecuted. Such inaction allows offenders, who will often have multiple victims, to go without punishment as well as create an unsafe environment for students. **Legislative responses to campus sexual assault must support survivors, uphold current available protections, and improve prevention with the following priorities in mind:**

**Partnerships:** Institutions have a unique opportunity to make significant and lasting change by integrating comprehensive sexual assault services and prevention through all aspects of campus life. State sexual assault coalitions and community-based rape crisis centers are experts in sexual violence with decades of experience conducting sexual assault training and prevention education as well as building an evidence base founded in practice and the real experiences of communities. Only community-based rape crisis center staff can ensure confidential communication with victims and have no conflict of interest since they are not university employees. They stand ready to work with colleges and universities to implement services, prevention and training programming. **Legislation addressing campus sexual assault must include a requirement that campuses enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a local, community-based rape crisis center or other program serving survivors and/or the state sexual assault coalition. MOUs could include, but should not be limited to:**

- An agreement, including fee structure, for the rape crisis center to provide confidential victim services;
- An agreement and fee structure for the rape crisis center or state sexual assault coalition to provide case consultation and training to confidential advisors;
- Consultation and provision of prevention education programs; consultation and provision of staff training;
- Development of training and/or prevention curricula;
- Office space for a rape crisis center advocate to meet with victims;
- Review of policies and procedures related to sexual assault; and
- Participation in a campus sexual assault task force and/or SART team.

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**Advocacy & Confidentiality:** The cornerstone of rape crisis advocacy is empowering survivors to regain control by making their own decisions following sexual assault. Campuses are tasked with preventing these crimes, supporting survivors, creating a safe learning environment and holding offenders accountable. In doing this, we must keep the needs of survivors central to this process by granting advocates confidentiality when supporting survivors on campuses.

**Mandatory reporting policies requiring campuses to report sexual assaults to local law enforcement are unacceptable, even with an opt-out provision.** Survivors must be apprised of the avenues and procedures for reporting as well as advocacy assistance in making and following through with reports. However, the decision to report must be the survivor's decision. NAESV and Know Your IX conducted an internet survey in March 2015. Almost 90% of survivors responded "yes," they should retain the choice whether and to whom to report. When asked their concerns if reporting to police were mandatory, 79% said, "this could have a chilling effect on reporting," while 72% were concerned that "survivors would be forced to participate in the criminal justice system/go to trial."

At the same time, it is essential for campuses to rigorously investigate reported sexual assaults and proactively look for patterns of perpetration. Campuses must be clear which employees have a duty to report as a responsible employee and which employees can guard confidentiality. Campuses provide statistics for Clery Act reporting that are de-identified and ensure a method of sharing information about specific crimes without identifying the victim, when authorized to do so by a victim who has been fully and accurately informed about what procedures shall occur if the information is shared. Such action protects the safety and wellbeing of the victim and better protects overall campus safety.

**Training:** Adequate training for staff to help ensure trauma-informed services and response systems is imperative to support survivors and to change a culture that tolerates sexual violence. Institutions should provide new campus security and police officers with training on sexual assault investigations, and annual policy reviews for quality assurance. Title IX officers should be required to attend annual trainings and partner with community-based rape crisis centers and/or state sexual assault coalitions. Additionally, campuses should include local rape crisis centers and/or state sexual assault coalitions in identifying plans for resolution agreements and compliance reviews between higher education institutions and the U.S. Department of Education. Campuses need training on sex offending behaviors and effective sanctions, and this training can be provided by state coalitions, local rape crisis centers, and/or their professional allies.

**Prevention:** Primary prevention strategies are focused on stopping the violence before it happens. Institutions must assess their readiness for prevention and measure the effectiveness of programs. State sexual assault coalitions and community-based agencies, often funded by the Rape Prevention Education (RPE) Program, are essential partners to help provide training and technical assistance about evidence-based and evidence-informed strategies to prevent sexual violence.

**Climate Surveys:** NAESV supports a requirement that universities conduct climate surveys to better ascertain the extent and nature of sexual violence on individual campuses. It will be essential that climate survey questions are developed using the strongest scientific data available and with the help of experts, informed by experience conducting surveys of sexual violence victimization, as well as

experienced advocates from rape crisis centers. Climate surveys must be developed in a spirit of mutual collaboration and teamwork, and just as survey development will require collaboration, so too will the process of interpreting results and developing action steps. Sexual violence is an endemic social problem with complex causes. There is little to be gained from simplistic finger-pointing. Recently, the United States Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics released the [Campus Climate Validation Study Final Technical Report](#) which is an important resource for campuses contemplating a climate survey. [The Administrator Researcher Campus Climate Consortium \(ARC3\)](#) is also an important non-profit campus climate survey resource.

**Title IX and the Clery Act:** The Department of Education's Title IX sexual assault guidance and the Clery Act with Campus SaVE amendments (VAWA 2013) are critically important tools for addressing campus sexual harassment and assault. Recognizing that individual survivors find themselves in unique circumstances with varying and changing needs, Title IX requirements have developed to expand options and methods of support for survivors on campus. For many survivors, that includes a criminal justice response, and for many others it does not. In the same spirit of survivor trust and empowerment, the recent Campus SaVE amendments to the Clery Act require schools to inform survivors of their option to report to police, or not to report, and provide assistance and access to interim measures in either case. Title IX and the Clery Act are effective tools to support survivors, increase institutional transparency, hold individual offenders accountable and improve community safety. **NAESV would oppose any legislative efforts to undermine protections in the Title IX Guidance or Clery Act.**

**Campus Disciplinary Proceedings:** Recently, much has been made of schools' authority to sanction students up to expulsion for sexual misconduct violations, based on a preponderance of the evidence presented in internal administrative hearings. Some critics have argued that, to ensure due process, students accused of criminal conduct should only be adjudicated in criminal courts. However, NAESV encourages all institutions of higher education to maintain campus processes with standards befitting a non-criminal, internal proceeding to respond to sexual misconduct and to keep these processes separate from any criminal justice process. Campus disciplinary proceedings should use a standard of evidence no higher than preponderance of the evidence.

Long before Title IX, colleges and universities exercised authority to sanction their students for policy violations, regardless of whether the conduct also constitutes a crime. There is also ample legal precedent in non-educational settings. Under Title VII, employers must conduct their own investigations of sexual harassment complaints and take remedial actions, often including terminating an employee found responsible for harassment. This is not to say schools' procedures are adequate at present. Survivors continually describe inadequately trained investigators and adjudicators. Many schools provide for no independent review of sexual misconduct determinations, and some campuses have actively covered up assaults or discouraged survivors from reporting to the police. This is plainly unacceptable, and we must continue to hold schools accountable for their shortcomings. Ultimately, transparent procedures and equitable policies also protect survivors as counter-complaints and defamation lawsuits by accused students are becoming too common in many states.

**Have additional questions?** Contact Terri Poore, Policy Director, at [terri@endsexualviolence.org](mailto:terri@endsexualviolence.org)