

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 25, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington D.C. 20037

Dear Secretary Blinken,

Thank you for your leadership in ensuring that State Department personnel can work in safe, inclusive and dignified environments. We write to voice concerns about long-standing issues of sexual harassment and assault at the Department and to urge you to use executive authority to advance many of the provisions in H.R. 8465, the *State Harassment and Assault Prevention and Eradication (SHAPE) Act*, introduced in the previous Congress.

For years, civil service and foreign service officers have spoken out about misconduct, including sexual harassment and assault, and a lack of accountability for such misconduct at the Department. In April 2020, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) identified the State Department as an agency that could be doing more to keep employees safe and hold perpetrators accountable in a report titled, “Federal #MeToo: Examining Sexual Harassment in Government Workplaces.” These findings were based on a document review, public testimony, and public comments submitted by current and former State Department employees.

In September 2020, the State Department Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released a report with similar findings highlighting the lack of guidance on the investigative and disciplinary processes for sexual harassment and assault reports; inconsistent coordination among offices; poor data collection, and lack of timeliness standards. The OIG review of the Department’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) data found that between 2014 and 2017, reports of sexual harassment increased by 63 percent and reports of sexual assault increased by 71 percent at the Department. This is likely an underestimate, since an OIG survey also found that 47 percent of employees who experienced or observed sexual harassment within the last 2 years did not report it, in part due to lack of confidence in the Department’s ability to resolve complaints, fear of retaliation and damaging “corridor reputation,” and reluctance to discuss the harassment with

others. The OIG report recommended six changes which the Department concurred with, including developing and implementing a system for tracking the length and outcomes of sexual harassment cases and developing guidance on case referrals and documentation necessary to make a disciplinary decision.

The *SHAPE Act* addresses many of the issues raised in the USCCR and OIG reports by presenting a comprehensive approach to preventing and addressing harassment, discrimination, and sexual assault. It was crafted in consultation with survivors, including current and former State Department personnel who had endured gross misconduct that was swept under the rug. It has the support of various stakeholders, including the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Truman National Security Project, Foreign Policy for America, Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security, and Women Ambassadors Serving America. Given the urgency of addressing these issues for our national security, we urge you to use your executive authority to advance several provisions, including:

- Section 2 – A comprehensive policy for the Department on the prevention of and response to harassment, discrimination, sexual assault, and related retaliation involving employees, contractors, and officials;
- Section 3 – A robust definition of harassment, clear guidance on the responsibilities of and coordination between offices, and timeliness standards for the investigation of harassment complaints;
- Section 4 – Comprehensive sexual assault protocol and guidelines that conform to best practices in the field;
- Section 6 – Employee climate surveys assessing the prevalence of harassment, discrimination, sexual assault, and related retaliation and comfort with the reporting and resolution mechanisms;
- Section 8 – Robust training for supervisors, bystanders, managers, and senior leadership.

In addition to these reforms, we encourage you to undertake a comprehensive review of disciplinary offenses and penalties imposed by the Department since January 2018 for discrimination, harassment, and sexual assault, whether they were administered consistently, and were commensurate with the severity of the allegations. We also urge you to collect and analyze more recent data on sexual harassment and assault than the OIG's analysis of 2014 – 2017 data to capture recent trend lines, and establish mechanisms to collect, analyze, and publish these data at regular intervals moving forward. Data collection should include not only aggregate numbers of complaints but also the average timeframe for resolution and the types of disciplinary action.

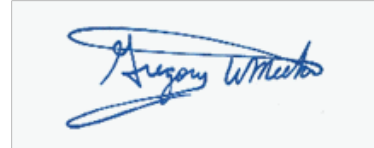
We recognize this is not an exhaustive list of reforms that the Department has the authority to undertake, and we encourage you to evaluate other proposed or possible changes in order to further safety, equity, and respect in the workplace. We request a staff briefing from appropriate representatives in the Department, including representatives from the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Office of Civil Rights, Global Talent Management, and Diplomatic Security, within 60 days of receipt of this letter on agency efforts to address harassment, discrimination and assault, including progress made in moving forward with the proposed changes.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and stand ready to assist your efforts.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier  
Co-Chair  
Democratic Women's Caucus



Gregory Meeks  
Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



Joaquin Castro  
Chairman  
International Development, International Organizations  
and Global Corporate Social Impact Subcommittee

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Jim Cooper  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Dina Titus  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Sylvia Garcia  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Lois Frankel  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Ed Case  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Raúl M. Grijalva.  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
André Carson  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Tom Malinowski  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Andy Kim  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Grace Meng  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Gwen S. Moore .  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Kathy Manning  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Brenda L. Lawrence  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress

CC Office of Civil Rights Director Gregory Smith, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer  
Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley