

Statement of Senator Claire McCaskill

Before the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

*Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act: Combating Campus Sexual Assault*

July 29, 2015

Thank you, Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray, for holding this important hearing on the issue of sexual assault on our college campuses. These crimes are troubling to parents, students, and educators. As a mother and former prosecutor of sex crimes, I am working extensively with my Senate colleagues to ensure students are protected from incidents of sexual violence and perpetrators are held accountable.

I was proud to work with Senators Heller, Gillibrand, Ayotte, Grassley, Blumenthal, Warner and Rubio to introduce last year's version of the *Campus Accountability and Safety Act* or CASA. Over the past 15 months, our coalition of 8 offices has met with over 60 organizations, including groups representing survivors, students, colleges and universities and their associations, law enforcement, victim advocacy and researchers.

After introducing last year's version of CASA in July of 2014, we continued to meet with stakeholders and gather additional feedback resulting in significant improvements to the bill. We have since reintroduced CASA (S. 590) with an even larger bipartisan coalition. Currently, the bill has 33 cosponsors, 12 Republicans and 21 Democrats. That's a bipartisan coalition you don't see every day in Washington, and our legislation is stronger for it. I am enormously proud of the work our coalition has done to not only craft this legislation, but to finally bring this terrible crime out from the shadows to make it a priority on our nation's campuses.

As a former prosecutor, I take special interest in ensuring that survivors are given adequate support and feel empowered to make informed decisions regarding the adjudication and disposition of their cases. Our legislation would establish new campus resources and support services for students who are survivors of sexual assault. Colleges and universities would be required to designate Confidential Advisors to assist survivors of sexual assault. The Confidential Advisor is a survivor-centered person that guides the survivor through the difficult process of understanding potential legal and campus reporting processes following a sexual assault and can provide confidentiality through that process.

Not only would the Confidential Advisor coordinate support services for survivors, they would also provide critical information about options for reporting these crimes to campus authorities and/or local law enforcement. Confidential Advisors will support the students every step of the way and will put survivors back in charge of what happens to them moving forward. We have heard from advocates and survivors that survivors need someone they can talk to in order to learn about their options without being forced to make a permanent decision right away. Because the Confidential Advisor works solely at the direction of the survivor and provides important information on reporting sexual assault, I believe their creation is critical to tackling the underreporting that pervades this issue and leaves perpetrators unaccountable. It's my hope that this provision empowers a student who is assaulted on a Friday night, to know on that same

Friday night – who he or she can call and where he or she can go for confidential support and good information.

We must continue to work to improve survivor confidence in the judicial and campus systems, which will, in turn, increase reporting, support survivors, and punish perpetrators of sexual assault on our college campuses. I look forward to working with my Senate colleagues and members of this committee on this provision of the bill and the larger Campus Accountability and Safety Act in the coming months.