

## Support For Survivors of Sexual Assault

Endorse COP/WSA's recommendations on exempting higher education institutions from the Administrative Procedures Act and form an educational model for conduct proceedings.

### 2017 Agenda Item

## **Issue: Support for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence**

**Presenters): Nora Selander, Bridget Williams, Leanna Sauerlander, Sarah Gallagher, Sofia Peny**

### **Considerations for presenters:**

- Describe the issue: What is the problem? What is the solution?
- How does it directly impact and improve students' lives?
- Please provide background information and the current context of the issue.
- Does it have a clear target? If yes, who?
  - o (e.g. a specific legislator, committee, or other agency)
- How will it strengthen and expand efforts within Western?
- How could students build a diverse campus coalition around this issue?
- In what way does it have a local/state/federal organizing and lobbying angle?
- What creative and/or innovative tactics could we employ to engage the media and excite new students around this issue?

Sexual and domestic violence on our college campuses is a real issue for all students. These acts of aggression range from unwanted stalking or touching, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and rape. An estimate of **one in every five womxn** are sexually assaulted while they are in college and only around 13% are able to report due to personal or institutional barriers. The ASWWU recognizes that this issue is not one that exclusively impacts women and female identified folks, and that male identified and gender nonconforming folks also experience sexual and domestic violence. On top of the barriers that exist for female identified folks who wish to report, there are unique barriers that often go unrecognized for male identified and gender nonconforming people. On top of this, campuses often perpetuate victim-blaming, a huge part of rape culture, which has manifested itself in our universities. Multiple campuses in the state of Washington have been part of a federal investigation into how our campuses are

handling these issues. Some beginnings of a solution include funding for counseling services, which are currently underfunded and too understaffed to support students who are survivors of sexual violence. The difficulty in trying to navigate through the information that is available can be an additional barrier to a person who is thinking about getting help/wanting to report an incident. Additionally, faculty and staff need to be trained on supporting survivors and coordinating campus resources.

Sexual assault prevention campaigns are highly supported on college campuses because there is little opposition to the concept of preventing sexual assault. However, taking up this issue from the side of support for survivors acknowledges that this is a problem on campuses and that people are not being adequately taken care of when they experience violence and seek support. Advocating for funding for more supportive services is important because sexual and domestic violence is so pervasive. Shedding light on this issue will help to pressure legislators into taking action.

Historically, national legislative acts such as Title IX and the Clery Act were created to make higher education safer and more accessible for marginalized communities, especially womxn. Though they have had some positive impact, these legislative acts haven't been enough. 106 schools across the nation are currently under investigation by the Dept, of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

This has increased the attention being given to sexual violence on college campuses per the national investigation of many institutions on their sexual assault policies. Last year the Office of Civil Rights from the U.S. Department of Education was on multiple campuses looking into allegations of the mishandling of students' reports of sexual assault. A federal investigation of ineffective policies for supporting survivors of sexual violence pushes the State of Washington into the spotlight around this issue. This issue is currently receiving a lot of wide-spread support and from many different local, state, and federal organizations, which helps to leverage our pressure and increasing the likelihood that specific legislators will be motivated to take a stand with us.

There are many campus groups, community organizations, and individual students who will want to get behind working on this issue because sexual and domestic violence 1) is an issue that is experienced across the identity spectrum and 2) drastically affects a survivor's ability to be an active and healthy member of the campus community. Because of how strongly this issue impacts people on our campus and because of how deeply it is felt, there are going to be many people that relate to or care about this issue. This issue has the potential to build a broad coalition because there are many organizations and movements at the state and local level lobbying on the issues of sexual and domestic violence. Many of the campuses involved in the WS A have already been independently working on this issue and the report compiled by the WS A shows that this issue urgently needs to be addressed. Addressing this issue not from a prevention standpoint but from supporting survivors is a very powerful angle. From this angle there is no

minimizing the issue or ignoring the fact that instances of sexual and domestic violence are taking place, impacting students, and our universities are not doing enough to provide support. Also, many campuses have been lobbying on student success packages that include more funding for counseling services. However, separating this issue into its own agenda item is also a testament to the extreme and undeniable need for these services.

The following legislators have control over the budget and policies regarding higher education, depending on what part of the issue on which we focus (funding v. policy.)

House Higher Education Chair

Senate Higher Education Leadership

House Appropriations Members

Senate Ways and Means Members

Tactics to consider while organizing around this issue:

- Carry that weight style awareness actions
- Send legislators small cut-outs of people (gingerbread style) representing how many people on campus are affected by this issue (reference the 1 in 5 statistic)
- On campus educational tactic- clip cut outs to a string and wrap around the light posts on red square to represent the number of survivors
- Potentially send letters to legislators with an account (anonymous or not, up to individual) of a survivor's experience and explain how many people on campus are affected by this issue.
- Look for avenues to provide testimony from survivors as much as possible in order to empower voices and **not** speak *for* survivors