

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2022

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Garland,

We would like to call your attention to a smaller, yet significant, provision contained within the 2,741 pages of the recently approved Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 (Public Law 117-103). Section 1307 requires the Department of Justice (DOJ) to convene an interagency working group to harmonize the collection of data on sexual violence within the next six months.

This is vitally important because it is difficult to address abuse if we aren't even properly identifying and measuring it. Nearly 350,000 people are raped or are subjected to an attempted rape in the U.S. a year and one-in-five women in the U.S. experience a rape or attempted rape during their lifetime. [These statistics](#) are alarming, and yet the numbers don't even tell the whole story.

That is because most survivors do not report the incident to the police, but also because of the Washington bureaucracy's confusing case counting that lacks clarity and consistency. Consider, there are four federal agencies managing at least ten efforts to collect data on sexual violence which are using 23 different terms to describe sexual violence!

No matter what you call it, sexual violence is always wrong. But the lack of clarity in how the terms are defined is causing confusion. The result is varying estimates ranging from 244,190 rape or sexual assault victimizations in a single year to as many as 1,929,000 victims of rape or attempted rape during the same period.

This is about more than just numbers not adding up. Accurate "data on the occurrence of sexual violence are critical to preventing, addressing, and understanding the consequences of these types of crimes," according to the [Government Accountability Office](#), which found the inconsistencies could be hindering our efforts.

That was in 2016 and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which has the authority to coordinate federal statistics, [has still not made any effort to fix the problem](#). That is why Congress is counting on you and the DOJ to do the job that OMB has not.

Every survivor counts and needs to be counted because if we don't even understand the problem, we will never be able to end the abuse. Thank you again for your attention to this important matter and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any assistance to the effort.

Sincerely,


Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator


Mariannette Miller-Meeks, M.D.
Member of Congress