

H I G H E R E D U C A T I O N

# A L E R T

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## PRESIDENT OBAMA LAUNCHES TASK FORCE ON CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULTS

*By Rebecca Lacher*

On January 22, 2014, President Obama announced the creation of a [Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault](#). The Task Force was announced in conjunction with the release of a report on rape and sexual assault from the White House Council on Women and Girls. The report, titled [Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action](#), calls attention to the particular problem of campus sexual assaults:

- 1 in 5 women has been sexually assaulted while in college;
- only 12 percent of student victims report the assault to law enforcement;
- most college victims are assaulted by someone they know; and
- alcohol and drugs contribute to many sexual assaults on campus.

The report recognizes the current administration's efforts to better enforce the laws addressing rape and sexual assault at educational institutions, including Title IX and the Clery Act. Referring to the many "tools in the toolbox" of enforcement, the report explains that the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights' may deny federal funds (it makes no mention of fines) and that the Department of Justice can initiate litigation to require schools to better address campus sexual assaults.

However, the report also states that change is required to make campuses safer. It calls on schools to adopt better policies and practices to prevent these crimes and to more effectively respond when they happen.

In announcing the Task Force, the President criticized compliance with the Federal laws aimed at campus safety as uneven and too often inadequate. He called for strengthening compliance and providing institutions with additional resources to address rape and sexual assault on campus. To that end, the Task Force will:

- work with agencies to develop a coordinated Federal response to campus rape and sexual assault;
- ensure that institutions comply fully with their legal obligations to prevent and respond to rape and sexual assault;
- increase the public's awareness of an institution's track record in addressing rape and sexual assault;
- improve transparency of the government's enforcement activities; and
- enhance coordination among federal agencies to hold schools accountable if they do not confront sexual violence on their campuses.

The Task Force will be co-chaired by designees from the Office of the Vice President and the White House Council on Women and Girls and will include as members Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Attorney General Eric Holder. Proposals and recommendations will be submitted by April 22, 2014 and the first annual report on implementation efforts will be provided to the President next January.

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We can assist you and your institution with taking the necessary steps to meet the compliance requirements that are the focus of the White House and Senate Task Forces. ◆

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