

December 6th, 2023

The Honorable Dr. Arati Prabhakar  
Office of Science and Technology Policy  
New Executive Office Building  
725 17th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Prabhakar,

On behalf of the undersigned societies we thank you and your staff for your efforts to implement the provisions of the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, helping ensure our nation's continued global leadership in science, technology, and innovation.

Our organizations continue to prioritize building support for appropriations that will ensure the full realization of the positive impacts of the CHIPS and Science Act. Additionally, we are prepared to assist the Administration in its implementation of CHIPS and Science provisions, including a critical section of the law: Division B, Title V, Subtitle D, Combating Sexual Harassment in Science.

Inclusive work environments with well-defined standards of professionalism in STEM are critical for the career advancement of all members of the U.S. scientific enterprise. Unfortunately, sexual harassment in the US R&D ecosystem continues to deter women from joining and persisting in the STEM workforce. Harassment undermines career advancement for women in STEM, especially for women who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups. Harassment remains a pervasive reality in the R&D ecosystem, highlighted by multiple reports and surveys. Recent examples include the 2022 report on the U.S. Antarctic program [1] and a recent survey of early-career physics researchers, which found that more than one in eight early-career women had experienced physical harassment in their work [2].

There is an urgent need for action at every level of the R&D ecosystem. The inclusion of the Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act was a significant step forward, delineating concrete steps to coordinate interagency efforts in this space and to develop uniform harassment policies accross agencies, authorizing research programs aimed at reducing sexual harassment, and updating the National Academies' report titled "On Being A Scientist: A Guide to Responsible Conduct in Research."

We are particularly concerned with the lack of public action from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the federal agencies in conducting an inventory of existing harassment policies and developing a uniform policy to address unwelcoming workplaces in federally-funded projects. We urge OSTP and the federal science agencies' leadership to prioritize prompt and effective action. Additionally, we urge OSTP to ensure that these policies are held to at least the same standard as private sector employers. The policies should also be consistent with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) findings on comprehensive and effective anti-harassment policy, part of the EEOC Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector guidance [3].

The undersigned societies stand ready to partner with the federal government in implementing the urgently needed provisions of the Combatting Sexual Harassment in Science Act. As a next step, we would appreciate a meeting between a small subset of representatives from our organizations and appropriate OSTP staff to discuss OSTP's plans going forward and how we might be able to help.

We thank you for giving this critical issue the importance and priority it deserves.

American Astronomical Society

American Chemical Society

American Educational Research Association

American Mathematical Society

American Physical Society

American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Optica (formerly OSA), Advancing Optics and Photonics Worldwide

SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics

[1] National Science Foundation (NSF), Office of Polar Programs (OPP), United States Antarctic Program (USAP), **Sexual Assault/Harassment Prevention and Response (SAHPR) Final Report**, 2022, <https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/documents/USAP%20SAHPR%20Report.pdf>

[2] Frances A. Houle; Kate P. Kirby; Michael P. Marder; **Ethics in physics: The need for culture change**, *Physics Today* 76 (1), 28–35 (2023); <https://pubs.aip.org/physicstoday/article/76/1/28/2877386/Ethics-in-physics-The-need-for-culture-changeA-new>

[3] U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Federal Sector, <https://www.eeoc.gov/federal-sector/reports/promising-practices-preventing-harassment-federal-sector>