

Senator Tillis Applauds Passage Of Sexual Harassment Reform Bill

By Donna Martinez

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U.S. Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) applauded passage of bipartisan legislation to reform the process to pursue claims of sexual harassment or other workplace discrimination experienced on Capitol Hill is headed to the president's desk. The legislation would reform the dispute resolution process, protect workers, increase transparency and hold Members of Congress accountable.

"It is my hope this important legislation sends a message that sexual harassment or workplace discrimination is unacceptable not only in the United States Congress but in every industry across the country. Workers deserve to have a safe work environment and no one ever feels threatened to come forward with a dispute," **said Senator Tillis.** "This bipartisan legislation will bring a more transparent dispute process to Capitol Hill so Americans have faith that Members of Congress are being held accountable for bad actions and workers are protected in the workplace."

This legislation would change the way harassment claims are handled in Congress by eliminating the required 30-day "counseling" period, the required 30-day mediation phase, and the 30-day "cooling off" period. The legislation would allow a victim to immediately pursue an administrative hearing or file a civil action. It would also hold Members of Congress personally liable by requiring them to reimburse the Treasury for awards and settlements stemming from acts of harassment they personally commit, including Members who leave office.

Specifically, the legislation would:

- Hold Members of Congress personally liable by pay for awards and settlements stemming from acts of harassment and related retaliation they personally commit, including Members who leave office.
- Eliminate the required 30-day "counseling" period, the required 30-day mediation phase, and the 30-day "cooling off" period.
- Provide employees with access to a dedicated advocate who will provide consultation and assistance regarding proceedings before the Office of Compliance.
- Require public reporting of awards and settlements, including identifying if a Member of Congress was personally liable.
- Require awards or settlements to be automatically referred to the Committee on Ethics for claims against Members of Congress and senior staff.
- Extend protections under the Congressional Accountability Act to unpaid staff, including interns, detailees and fellows, and other Legislative Branch staff.
- Provide opportunities for employees to work remotely or request paid leave without fear

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of retribution.

- Require a survey of staff each Congress to examine the workplace culture on Capitol Hill.
- Provide additional support for state, district and regional Legislative Branch staff to ensure they have the same access to Office of Compliance resources, training opportunities, guidance and advice as Washington D.C. based legislative branch workers.
- Require the Office of Compliance to establish an electronic system for taking in claims by victims, tracking those claims throughout the process, and generating reports on various details of claims.