

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Joins Sen. Ernst to introduce legislation to improve sexual violence data collection

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Contact:

[Austin Altenburg](#) (Johnson)

[Kelsi Daniell](#) (Ernst)

Legislation will improve sexual violence data collection at the Departments of Defense, Justice, Education and Health and Human Services

WASHINGTON — Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and Sen. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) announced the introduction Tuesday of legislation to improve the collection of sexual violence data at key federal agencies. The legislation will implement recommendations from a [Government Accountability Office report](#) that found vast differences in data collection efforts — including the use of 23 different terms to describe sexual violence.

“The first step in solving any problem is gathering the information you need to properly define it,” Sen. Johnson said. **“We must improve the quality and consistency of sexual assault data made available across government agencies. The time to act on the recommendations of our federal watchdog is now.”**

“No matter what you call it, sexual violence is always wrong and deserves a clear and comprehensive solution to address it. But we can’t solve this problem unless we properly identify and collect data to accurately

measure it,” Sen. Ernst said. **“This bill will help clarify the definition of sexual violence and improve data so that we can address this issue head on.”**

Sexual violence is underreported in the United States and federal agencies are collecting important data to help us understand and address the problem. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found vast differences in how the Departments of Defense, Education, Health and Human Services and Justice manage 10 different efforts to collect data on sexual violence, which vary widely in target population, terminology, and measurements. GAO reported that “differences in data collection efforts may hinder the understanding of the occurrence of sexual violence, and agencies’ efforts to explain and lessen differences have been fragmented and limited in scope.” Getting the best possible data will help researchers and policy makers assess the problem and find better solutions. It will also ensure that the public knows and understands the impacts of sexual violence in this country.

The legislation requires that the Office of Management and Budget — which has oversight over federal agencies’ data collection — follow GAO’s recommendations and work with the Departments of Defense, Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services to improve coordination across agencies and develop useful and transparent sexual violence statistics in order to help prevent and address sexual violence and better understand the consequences of these crimes.

Sen. Johnson introduced similar legislation with then-Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) last Congress that passed the Senate by unanimous consent. Text of the bill can be found [HERE](#).