

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6375

www.science.house.gov

December 11, 2019

Dr. France A. Córdova
Director
National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Dr. Córdova:

We write to express concern about recent incidents of harassment at the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the adequacy of the response from NSF senior management. As leaders on the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, the wellbeing of the Federal scientific community is of utmost importance to us. We are requesting a meeting with you to discuss how NSF is addressing this incident, responding to the needs of those affected, and working to prevent such problems in the future.

In recent years, we have seen an increased focus on reducing the incidence of harassment in academia and the negative impacts it has on the careers of women scientists. NSF has been a leader in this area, particularly by instituting changes to the agency's award terms and conditions to require grantees to disclose findings and administrative action taken related to an investigation of harassment. We applaud you for these efforts. However, there is more work to be done in creating a culture of inclusion and accountability throughout the U.S. scientific enterprise and, as recent events make clear, within our nation's scientific agencies.

It is disturbing to us that harassing behavior conducted by some employees at NSF targeting other NSF employees based on their sexual orientation appears to have gone unreported and unaddressed for up to a year and that, while such behavior was being investigated, the affected employees' experiences were made public without their consent. It is our hope that NSF and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) will examine their responses to these

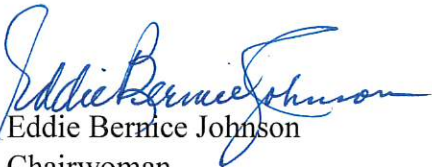
incidents to ensure appropriate practices and procedures are in place to enable a collaborative and prompt approach that prioritizes the safety and wellbeing of NSF staff.

As the 2018 National Academies report on sexual harassment in the sciences found, harassment remains a persistent problem in the workplace and organizational climate is the single greatest predictor of the occurrence of harassment. A workplace that is intolerant of harassment is one in which all levels of leadership are committed to ensuring that (1) targets of harassment are supported and protected from retaliation, (2) instances of harassment are investigated fairly and in a timely manner, (3) those found to have committed harassment are punished appropriately, (4) employees are regularly informed about steps being taken to respond to and prevent harassment. The Academies report also emphasized the importance of moving beyond a reliance on formal reporting to assess and improve organizational climate. NSF's leadership on harassment in the academic environment also demands commitment to these principles and to a welcoming and supportive environment within its own four walls.

The dedicated employees working at the nation's Federal science agencies are critical to fulfilling the missions entrusted to those agencies by the American people. As part of the Committee's oversight responsibility, we are moving forward with a broad effort to assess the policies, procedures, and practices in place at Federal science agencies to ensure agency employees are able to work in an environment that is free from harassment and conducive to their success.

We look forward to meeting with you to discuss these issues and hearing about what steps NSF is taking to ensure a safe and welcoming workplace for all. Please contact Dahlia Sokolov at (202) 225-6375 on the Majority staff and Jennifer Wickre at (202) 225-6371 on the Minority staff to set up the meeting.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology



Frank D. Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology