

New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Commission



Transforming Campus Climate

April 2026 | Action Plan

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New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Commission

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The New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Commission (“CSAC” or “Commission”) was established as an independent public body in accordance with [P.L. 2019, c. 299](#) .

The Commission operates in, but not of, the Department of State through the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (“OSHE”). This “Transforming Campus Climate” Action Plan from CSAC responds to the legislative charge of P.L. 2020, c.104. It sets forth a coordinated, statewide strategy to prevent and respond to campus sexual assault across New Jersey institutions of higher education (“IHEs”).

Recommendations of the Commission are grounded in data from campus climate surveys and informed by student, institutional, and community voices with the aim of strengthening infrastructure, improving assessment, and building collective capacity to ensure safer, more equitable campus environments.

The contents of this report were developed by CSAC in collaboration with institutional leaders, policy experts, student voices, and with technical assistance from OSHE.

However, its contents do not necessarily reflect the official policy of OSHE and a reader should not assume endorsement by the State of New Jersey.

Letter from the Campus Sexual Assault Commission: JANUARY 2026

New Jersey stands at a pivotal crossroads as federal policies on campus sexual assault continue to shift with changing presidential administrations. Dramatic changes to Title IX, the law prohibiting sex discrimination in educational programs, have significantly altered the landscape of campus sexual assault policy, leaving institutions without consistent guidance and students without enduring protections. Amid this evolving legal landscape, New Jersey must ask: how will we ensure our students are protected and campuses are safe and inclusive environments despite the constant changing tides of Title IX regulations? How will we move beyond “checking the box” of compliance to take meaningful action to improve campus safety?

First, we need to better understand the scope of the issue for New Jersey students and how it impacts educational opportunity. Sexual assault on college campuses remains a pervasive problem, with studies consistently showing that a significant percentage of students—particularly women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and students of color—experience sexual violence during their time in higher education.¹ Recognizing the critical role of data-driven strategies in addressing sexual violence, New Jersey took decisive action in 2020 with the passage of [P.L.2020, c.104.](#), mandating campus climate surveys across the state’s higher education institutions. The first round of statewide data has highlighted key areas for improvement, including the need to streamline data collection and assessment and promote consistency across institutions.

Second, we need to strengthen our collective capacity to prevent and respond to campus sexual assault by pooling resources and expertise. This can be achieved by fostering partnerships with state and county organizations, providing support for institutional action plans based on climate survey data, and ensuring that best practices are widely shared across all institutions of higher education. A robust, coordinated approach will ensure that institutions do not have to navigate these complex issues in isolation or expend limited resources on duplicative efforts. Building our collective capacity will create a more cost-effective approach to address campus sexual assault while enhancing the quality of prevention and response initiatives.

The Commission firmly believes that New Jersey is positioned to lead the nation in its response to campus sexual assault by implementing this Action Plan. Recommendations will transform campus climates and set a national standard for campus safety and equity—one that endures regardless of shifting federal priorities. This Action Plan is our roadmap toward a sustainable, evidence-based approach to prevent campus sexual assault.

Executive Overview: CSAC Action Plan Recommendations

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

The plan builds on:

- P.L. 2015, c.165 (Task Force on Campus Sexual Assault)
- Executive Order 61 (Working Group on Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments, 2019)
- P.L. 2020, c.104 (Campus Climate Survey Mandate)

CSAC 2026 Legislative Priorities

Identify areas for legislative consideration to inform policy relating to the understanding of sexual assault climate and compliance measures at institutions.

- Amend P.L. 2020, c.104 to explicitly require sexual assault content in surveys and introduce compliance measures.
- Secure funding for a quadrennial statewide survey and technical assistance model.
- Require institutions of higher education (IHEs) to publicly report de-identified survey summaries and progress.
- Codify CSAC as a permanent, funded advisory body.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Establish Institutional and State Infrastructure for Campus Safety

Commission:

- a. Support the development of resources, curate a best practices repository, and convene stakeholders to strengthen campus efforts.

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education:

- a. Designate a Safe & Inclusive Learning Environments Coordinator to ensure all implementation.

Institutions of Higher Education:

- a. Identify a campus liaison to voluntarily engage with CSAC.
- b. Facilitate communication among internal departments (e.g., campus law enforcement or Public Safety; Institutional Research; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Government Affairs) to address issues related to campus sexual assault.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Strengthen Statewide Campus Climate Assessment on Sexual Assault

Commission:

- a. Develop a brief standard survey question set.
- b. Offer a survey language glossary and guidance document.
- c. Support comparative state-level analysis.

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education:

- a. Work with the Legislature to amend P.L. 2020, c. 104 to include campus sexual assault domains and compliance.
- b. Align data collection efforts with the statutory requirement that institutions administer a campus climate survey at intervals no longer than four years.
- c. FY 2025–2026: Survey Development
 - i. FY 2026 – 2027: Campus Implementation
 - ii. FY 2027 – 2028: Campus Action Plan Development
 - iii. FY 2028 - 2029: Evaluation and Refinement

Institutions of Higher Education:

- a. Administer campus climate surveys in alignment with the statutory requirements and are strongly encouraged to incorporate core domains related to campus sexual assault, including:
 - i. Victimization experiences
 - ii. Awareness and access to resources
 - iii. Institutional response and climate perceptionsIHEs may utilize the standardized survey instrument developed through this action plan or incorporate these core domains into their existing campus climate survey tools.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Build Capacity for a Coordinated Community Response

Commission:

- a. Host a statewide annual convening (“Transforming Campus Climate”).
- b. Support development of IHE-led resource awareness campaigns.

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education:

- a. Leverage state communication systems to support IHEs in forming partnerships with community organizations to assist in developing programs to better support students.

“ I was a chemical engineer [major], and everyone knows that chemical engineering is one of the hardest [majors] to pursue in college... After I was raped on a Sunday, I had an exam on a Wednesday, and I spent all Monday in the hospital. So Tuesday, I’m like, wow... I have to study...the curriculum is hard enough as it is. I’m dealing with this whole weight on my shoulders. So, I failed a class, I got a D in another class, C’s in the rest... I think I got like a 1.6 GPA [after previously making the Dean’s List with a 3.6 cumulative GPA].

It really plummeted my self-esteem, plummeted my grades, my sense of hope, my motivation... I started developing little like panics when I would like have to go out, because I just didn’t want to be in that environment, but I also didn’t want to be alone in my room, like crying myself to sleep... I couldn’t understand why can’t I get out of bed, because I wanted to. I wanted to learn, I wanted to improve my GPA.”

- Aria, New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Survivor

Note: The names of sexual assault survivors throughout this document have been changed to protect their privacy.

Introduction

College is often seen as a transformative time in a person's life, defined by newfound independence, personal growth, and a wealth of new experiences. From forging lifelong friendships to exploring academic pursuits, this chapter is filled with many rites of passage that shape who students become. Yet, amid these opportunities there is one experience that should never be part of anyone's college journey: campus sexual assault (CSA). This crime not only undermines the sense of safety and trust that is essential for a thriving academic community, it also has devastating impacts on survivors' emotional well-being, academic success, and future opportunities.

“ Safety and a sense of belonging on campus serve as the foundation for student success. New Jersey remains steadfast in its commitment to ensure our colleges and universities have the tools for students of all backgrounds to feel secure, included, and supported. We look forward to supporting the ongoing work of the Commission and collaborating on the implementation of strategies outlined in this Action Plan. ”

- Margo Chaly, Acting Secretary of Higher Education

Research consistently indicates that one in five women will be sexually assaulted before graduation: “This statistic has been replicated numerous times over the years through scientific research and it is clear that a larger number of undergraduate students, particularly women, are impacted by sexual violence while on campus.”² In more recent years researchers recognize that CSA impacts all student populations, with one in sixteen men and one in four transgender, nonbinary, and queer students reporting experiences of sexual assault.³ The FBI recognizes sexual assault as the second most violent crime, ranking only behind murder, which underscores its severity and the profound, long-lasting impact it has on survivors.

Sexual assault uniquely impacts college students, often derailing their education and future career prospects. Students who experience sexual assault are more likely to earn lower GPAs, miss classes, and are 14% more likely to drop out of school compared to their peers who have not been victimized.⁴ Survivors are also at an increased risk for anxiety, depression, and chronic health conditions. Research from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center shows that survivors of sexual assault are 10 times more likely to attempt suicide than those who have not experienced such trauma.⁵ No student's potential should be diminished by the trauma of sexual assault.

A safe campus environment is both a moral imperative and a critical factor for prospective students and their families when deciding where they will choose to pursue their higher education dreams.⁶ As any parent on a college tour can attest, campus safety is one of the foremost concerns when making decisions about where their child will spend these transformative years. High-profile incidents of CSA or mishandled cases can quickly tarnish an institution's standing and raise red flags for prospective students. Students' perceptions of campus safety and support systems can influence their decision to attend or remain at an institution, whereas a lack of trust can impact the state's ability to enroll and retain talented students. In a competitive higher education landscape, it is essential for the state's institutions to not only understand the unique challenges that impact their campus climate, but also to work collaboratively with state leaders to develop proactive strategies to address CSA. Safety must be an essential pillar of a New Jersey education for all students.

In recent years, New Jersey has implemented significant actions to address and prevent sexual assault on college campuses. The New Jersey State Plan for Higher Education: *Where Opportunity Meets Innovation: A Student-Centered Vision for New Jersey Higher Education*⁷ includes the tenant that every New Jersey student should feel safe and supported in their learning environment. In 2020 the Campus Sexual Assault Commission was established to study and recommend policies, strategies, and legislative initiatives to address and prevent sexual assault on college campuses.

Established via [P.L. 2020 c.104](#), the Commission's mission is: "To encourage and to foster diverse, inclusive, and safe environments for student learning and engagement free from physical harm, including, but not limited to, sexual harassment and violence, and discrimination by advancing the utilization of campus climate surveys and developing statewide action plans and initiatives to ensure all campuses are addressing the diverse and evolving needs of their campus community."⁸ The Commission's primary work to date includes 1) monitoring institutions' progress to implement campus climate surveys; 2) offering technical assistance toward administering climate surveys; and 3) developing this Action Plan in response to the needs identified by IHEs from their climate surveys.

The Commission recognizes that there is no "one size fits all" solution to improving campus safety. New Jersey's diverse institutions range from 2-year and 4-year colleges to residential and commuter campuses serving varied populations, including traditional undergraduates, online learners, and students in graduate or professional programs.⁹ The challenges faced by an 18-year-old living on a residential campus are vastly different from those of a working adult pursuing a technical certification. Therefore, the State Action Plan must be flexible and adaptable, allowing for customized approaches that meet the unique needs of each institution and its students while upholding a consistent standard of safety and accountability across all institutions.

Findings of the Campus Sexual Assault Commission: Current Challenges

Achieving a comprehensive approach to preventing sexual assault required the Commission to start by studying quantitative and qualitative data from New Jersey institutions. First, OSHE, in collaboration with the Commission, administered a landscape analysis of how campus climate surveys were administered throughout the State in compliance with P.L. 2020 c.104. IHEs completed a campus climate data submission form detailing the process that each institution used to conduct climate surveys.¹⁰ In total, 80 institutions submitted data based on climate surveys conducted between July 1, 2018, and June 30, 2023 (the “NJ IHE survey data”).

Second, the Commission conducted a series of five listening sessions with key stakeholders to provide direction on the development of a state-wide action plan. The listening sessions were designed to solicit feedback on climate survey implementation and how campuses can improve sexual assault prevention and response. Constituent groups who participated in the listening sessions included college and university students, IHE administrators, and community-based organizations.

The Commission’s study of these two data sources revealed the following three primary challenges and opportunities:

CHALLENGE #1:

Lack of Dedicated Funding and Personnel for Climate Assessment

Adequate funding for campus sexual assault prevention initiatives and personnel is essential to foster proactive and sustainable efforts across New Jersey’s higher education institutions. Funding preventative measures, such as climate surveys and educational programs, would allow institutions to address potential issues before harmful incidents impact student safety and success.

Significant challenges exist for institutions where the burden of climate survey administration, data analysis, and action planning lies within campus offices that are not appropriately equipped for the task. In listening sessions, campus personnel voiced concerns that climate surveys, while crucial, add to the overwhelming workload of staff members who are already stretched thin, particularly those overseeing Title IX; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and violence response offices. At smaller institutions, it is often a single individual with other major responsibilities related to CSA who is also tasked with administering these surveys and analyzing the data, a situation described by one campus practitioner as ‘a setup for failure.’ This highlights the urgent need for adequate State support to ensure that these important initiatives do not fall by the wayside.

Furthermore, for a state-level climate survey mandate to be effective, we must address the limited resources available at many institutions. Feedback from listening sessions indicated that collaboration between the State and institutions is necessary to develop a comprehensive action plan that includes guidance on staffing, distributing, and acting upon climate survey results. Without adequate funding and support, institutions risk being unable to meet these expectations, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of sexual assault prevention efforts and compromising campus safety.

Finally, the Commission itself has been constrained by the absence of resources allocated for personnel and initiatives to support IHEs in climate assessment and action planning. The Commission is composed of dedicated volunteers, each designated to serve terms ranging from one to three years. The Commission members remain steadfast in our goal to improve campus safety and support survivors of sexual assault, but meaningful progress stalled due to the all-volunteer and high-turnover structure of the Commission. Furthermore, the Commission currently has no allocated budget or access to State funding. These limitations have restricted the Commission's capacity to implement critical programs and ensure ongoing support for campuses across the state. Appropriate funding is necessary to fulfill the Commission's charge to combat the epidemic of CSA in New Jersey's higher education institutions.

! OPPORTUNITY

**Allocate State Funding and Personnel to Assess and Improve Campus Climate
(See Recommendation #1)**

CHALLENGE #2:

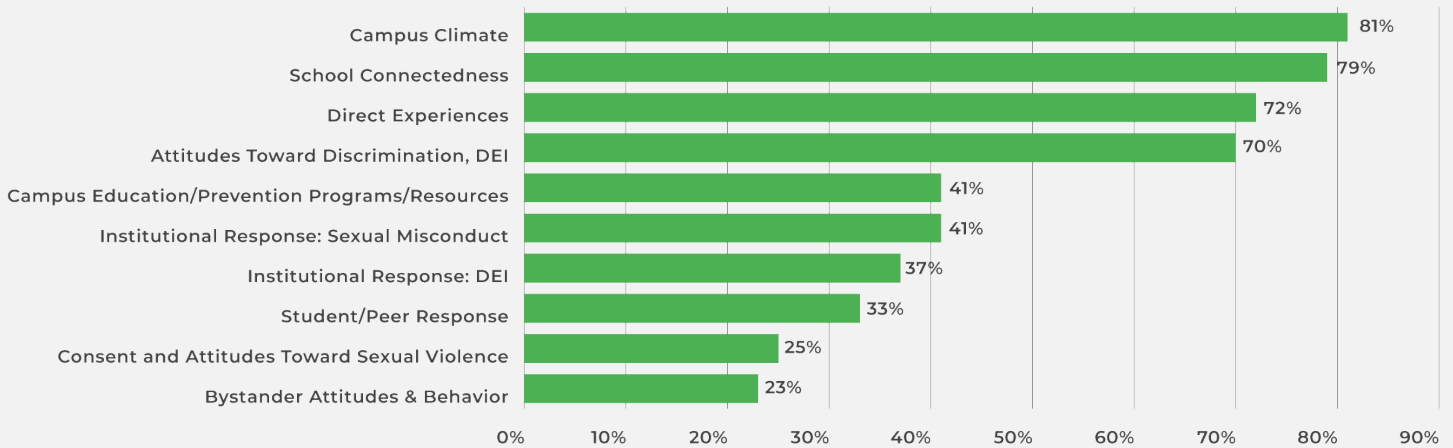
Lack of Campus Sexual Assault Data Collection

In 2020, New Jersey took an important step toward improving campus safety by requiring campus climate surveys. However, tracking and analyzing this data is extremely challenging because each institution: 1) currently administers different surveys; 2) administers surveys at different times; and 3) not all climate surveys have pertained to sexual assault. In fact, while 95% of IHEs administered a campus climate survey between 2018-2023, most surveys did not include questions related to sexual assault. Currently, P.L. 2020, c. 104 indicates that IHEs should conduct a "campus climate survey" at least every four years, but the statute does not specify what topics must be addressed in the survey. Feedback from listening sessions indicated a need for clarity in how the State defines "climate" under P.L. 2020 c.104. Campus administrators suggested the law should clearly indicate that climate surveys must pertain directly to campus sexual assault. This would ensure that the focus remains on addressing and preventing sexual assault, avoiding confusion, and ensuring compliance with the State's priorities. This is also in line with statutes in other states requiring campus climate surveys about sexual assault specifically.

The New Jersey IHE survey data shows that the core domains measured varied depending on the climate survey tools selected by each institution. Overall, the most assessed domains were Campus Climate, School Connectedness, and Direct Experiences, which may have measured sexual assault, discrimination, harassment, and/or bias. The majority (68%) of surveys included

a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion domains. Domains pertaining to sexual assault were least likely to be included on campus climate surveys: only 37% of institutions measured institutional response to sexual misconduct, 25% gauged student attitudes towards sexual violence, and just 23% collected data on bystander attitudes and behavior.

Core Domains Measured in Campus Climate Surveys



Another challenge faced by institutions using vastly different instruments to survey students is that IHEs are not able to see how they compare with peers, an average institution in a certain topic, or one doing an exceptional job in a particular area. Campus leadership often finds that it is difficult to establish a baseline with comparable institutions to make meaning of their own campus data. Standardizing measurement practices would also facilitate cross-institutional benchmarking, allowing institutions to more effectively identify areas for improvement and track progress over time.

Finally, the law does not currently indicate how IHEs should be held accountable if they fail to comply with its survey provisions. While the law establishes important standards for climate assessment, its effectiveness is undermined by the lack of enforceable penalties or oversight measures for noncompliance.

! OPPORTUNITY
Improve Statewide Assessment of Sexual Assault in Campus Climate Surveys
 (See Recommendation #2)

CHALLENGE #3:

Inadequate Action Plan Implementation

While most New Jersey institutions conducted campus climate surveys, the New Jersey IHE survey data highlight a critical gap between gathering information and taking meaningful action. When asked if they had established a dedicated working group or task force to plan, implement, and evaluate the necessary changes based on the data collected two-thirds (66.67%) of institutions indicated that they have not. Highly resourced institutions may have more robust systems for action planning, while smaller IHEs serving New Jersey's most vulnerable students may struggle to offer even basic support services. This fragmented approach also silos data and best practices for action planning, preventing campuses from learning from one another to address critical themes from climate surveys. Turning climate survey data into effective responses that reduce sexual and interpersonal violence is complex, and it becomes even more difficult without the capacity for a coordinated community response.

Scalable approaches to addressing CSA are needed to bridge these gaps and enable all institutions, regardless of their size or funding, to use best practices. This includes ensuring that the voices and experiences of underrepresented students are fully captured and addressed. By coordinating these efforts, New Jersey will not only address these disparities but also create a rising tide of shared knowledge and practices that strengthen prevention and response to sexual assault. If successful, New Jersey will serve as a national model for other states by demonstrating how a well-coordinated and equitable statewide approach can turn climate survey data into transformative action.

! OPPORTUNITY

**Build Capacity for a Coordinated Community Response to Campus Sexual Assault
(See Recommendation #3)**

“ Rape, sexual assault: they’re such traumatic experiences...It’s the worst problem that college campuses and universities are facing today... We need to talk about them. It just can’t [be] taboo in our society. And that is not at the fault of the survivors. It’s at the fault of society and the judgment and the stigma that resulted...My hope for the future is to become a trauma therapist to work with sexual assault victims.”

- Aria, New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Survivor

Commission Action Plan Recommendations

The 2018-2023 IHE survey data, CSAC-led listening sessions with campus and community-based organizations, and the experiences of New Jersey students all informed the following recommendations for the 2026 Action Plan:

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Establish Institutional and State Infrastructure for Campus Safety

OBJECTIVE: To enhance campus safety and foster inclusive learning environments through the establishment of a collaborative infrastructure.

RATIONALE: The establishment of institutional and state infrastructure dedicated to campus safety is essential to ensure the consistent, coordinated, and sustainable implementation of strategies to prevent and respond to campus sexual assault. While many IHEs demonstrate strong individual commitment to fostering safe learning environments, the absence of a unified framework leads to fragmentation, duplication of effort, and varying levels of institutional capacity. Establishing a clear infrastructure for campus safety will ensure that prevention and response efforts are coordinated, evidence-based, and widely available across institutions of differing sizes and missions.

A formal infrastructure will also strengthen accountability and communication. Designating a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments Coordinator within OSHE will centralize oversight and facilitate the delivery of technical assistance, data collection, and policy guidance, while also serving as a primary liaison to IHEs and community-based organizations. Similarly, identifying campus liaisons and facilitating cross-departmental collaboration within IHEs will advance a comprehensive campus approach to safety by linking prevention, data collection, and response functions. This alignment will allow for more effective use of institutional and state resources, ensuring that prevention and response initiatives are data-informed and integrated within broader institutional goals.

Finally, by establishing structured mechanisms for technical assistance, New Jersey can ensure that every institution has equitable access to the tools and knowledge necessary to improve campus climate consistent with the requirements of P.L. 2020 c.104. Creating a comprehensive website repository of best practices, templates, and resources vetted by CSAC will provide institutions with easy access to high-quality materials for prevention and response to CSA and interpersonal violence. This centralized resource will save institutions time and effort in developing their own materials and ensure that they are using evidence-based practices. Additionally, the repository will serve as a dynamic tool that can be continuously updated with new information and resources, ensuring that institutions always have access to the most current and effective strategies.

THE COMMISSION THEREFORE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:

Campus Sexual Assault Commission:

- a. Facilitate communication among IHEs and community-based organizations (CBOs).
- b. Provide technical assistance via webinars and a peer-learning community.
- c. Curate a best practices repository.

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education:

- a. Designate a Safe & Inclusive Learning Environments Coordinator to ensure all implementation.

Institutions of Higher Education:

- a. Identify a campus liaison to voluntarily engage with CSAC supports.
- b. Facilitate communication among internal departments (e.g., campus law enforcement or Public Safety; Institutional Research; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Government Affairs) to address issues related to campus sexual assault.

“ We need to start doing something about [campus sexual assault] because [survivors are] being failed. They’re being failed by colleges, administrations, the criminal justice system, by just society in general... I feel like we just need to do better as a society. I hope that by sharing stories of survivors, that we’re able to at least make a difference or show one person that this is something that they need to take seriously and they need to do something about it.”

- Sydney, New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Survivor

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Strengthen Statewide Campus Climate Assessment on Sexual Assault

OBJECTIVE: To enhance the assessment and improvement of campus safety and climate through the development and implementation of a standardized survey instrument and process.

RATIONALE: With the enactment of P.L. 2020 c.104, New Jersey prioritized the use of campus climate surveys in the statewide approach to reduce the prevalence and impact of sexual and interpersonal violence on college campuses. As the Commission considers the next level of advancing this charge, we recognize that previous climate survey implementation has been done inconsistently. As seen from the New Jersey IHE survey data, survey instruments have often focused on climate matters broadly, rather than collecting data specific to sexual assault.

Comparative analysis can be used to identify strengths across institutions by asking: who is getting it right, and what can we learn from their success? By viewing the data through the lens of shared challenges and opportunities, institutions can learn from one another and adopt best practices that are proven to be effective in similar environments. For example, if one institution demonstrates success in bystander intervention programs or survivor support services, other institutions can adapt those strategies to fit their specific needs. This approach encourages the exchange of innovative solutions and helps smaller or less-resourced campuses benefit from the lessons learned at other IHEs. Furthermore, CSAC can use comparative data to allocate resources more efficiently, directing additional support to campuses that are struggling with particular challenges while reinforcing successful initiatives elsewhere.

Therefore, the Commission recommends developing a standardized set of survey questions available to all New Jersey IHEs. This would allow IHEs to collect institution-specific data while enabling CSAC to combine anonymized, de-identified data from participating institutions into a larger dataset to understand and address statewide areas of concern. Skilled researchers could then identify statewide or sector-specific trends, particularly for student groups whose experiences may rarely, if ever, be reflected in data from a single institution. This larger data pool would help the state develop targeted initiatives that address the unique needs of underrepresented groups. As the data set grows, this could include better response to harms against students of color, veterans or ROTC members, commuters, religious students, and so on. While individual institution performance will not be shared publicly, the aggregate data would be used to allow for institutional benchmarking and tracking of state progress over time.

Offering a standardized set of questions will streamline their climate assessment efforts and have the benefit of working with a Statewide cohort to increase survey effectiveness. While a

“ [To] lead to more meaningful outcomes, state laws should provide clarity regarding the scope, definition, administration, dissemination, and translation of survey findings into sustainable, data-driven action. ”

- McMahon, et. al (2023) ¹¹

standardized instrument or set of core questions would create a baseline for comparison, institutions may tailor additional questions to meet their unique needs, with those responses excluded from the pooled data. This approach ensures both consistency in data collection and the flexibility to address institution-specific concerns.

THE COMMISSION THEREFORE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:

Campus Sexual Assault Commission:

- a. Develop a brief standard survey question set.
- b. Offer a survey language glossary and guidance document.
- c. Support comparative state-level analysis.

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education:

- a. Work with the Legislature to amend P.L. 2020, c. 104 to include campus sexual assault domains and compliance.
- b. Establish a four-year survey cycle:
 - i. FY 2025–2026: Survey Development (Lead: OSHE)
 - ii. FY 2026–2027: Campus Implementation (Lead: IHEs)
 - iii. FY 2027–2028: Campus Action Plan Development (Lead: IHEs)
 - iv. FY 2028–2029: Evaluation and Refinement (Leads: CSAC and OSHE)

Institutions of Higher Education:

- a. Administer campus climate surveys in alignment with the statutory requirements and are strongly encouraged to incorporate core domains related to campus sexual assault, including:
 - i. Victimization experiences
 - ii. Awareness and access to resources
 - iii. Institutional response and climate perceptions

IHEs may utilize the standardized survey instrument developed through this action plan or incorporate these core domains into their existing campus climate survey tools.

“ What we need to talk about is, not just what happens to assailants and attackers, but what happens to victims. We need to talk about the grueling aftermath of fighting our demons every day just to get out of bed and perform life’s daily functions. ”

- Drea, New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Survivor

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Build Capacity for a Coordinated Community Response

OBJECTIVE: To foster a collaborative environment for enhancing campus climate and resource awareness across IHEs in the state.

RATIONALE: While there are strong professional groups that include leading industry experts within the state, many of these are often siloed by campus roles or employee primary work functions. CSAC will strengthen cross-sector collaboration by fostering partnerships that leverage the expertise of community-based organizations to enhance the reach and effectiveness of campus safety initiatives. The 2023 Commission listening sessions revealed a need to foster a community of practice and develop resources for on-the-ground practitioners to increase their expertise. CSAC should support these efforts by offering educational opportunities for all who work with campus sexual and relationship violence.

Hosting a variety of in-person and virtual educational opportunities, including an annual statewide conference on campus sexual assault, will improve NJ IHE capacity to eliminate CSA by bringing together key stakeholders to share the latest research, strategies, and practices in addressing sexual assault and relationship violence on campuses. The face-to-face interactions fostered by a statewide annual conference will promote networking, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas, ultimately leading to more effective prevention and response strategies. Additionally, an annual conference will underscore the ongoing commitment of OSHE, the Commission, and partner agencies to transform campus climate.

The Commission recognizes that “campus climate” is multidimensional, including CSA, diversity, inclusivity and more. The climate is experienced differently by members of the campus community based on their identities, histories, marginalization, and structural forms of inequity. Additionally, CSA is closely linked with other forms of intimate partner violence (IPV), including dating/domestic violence, stalking, and other forms of relationship abuse. Thus, while the Commission is focused on addressing the issue of sexual assault and how it impacts students’ experiences in higher education, the issue cannot and should not be understood as siloed from other dimensions of the climate. As such, we recommend that educational programs offered by the Commission incorporate multiple aspects of campus climate.

THE COMMISSION THEREFORE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:


Campus Sexual Assault Commission:

- a. Host a statewide annual convening (“Transforming Campus Climate”)

Office of the Secretary of Higher Education:

- a. Leverage state communication systems to help IHEs form partnerships with CBOs and local agencies.





“ I know that we have the empathy that it takes to embrace survivors, and I know that we have the strength needed to change the culture around sexual violence. ”

- Keisha, New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Survivor

Conclusion: Transforming Campus Climate

Our progress to advance campus safety thus far is the result of tireless student activism, community advocacy, institutional commitment, and legislative efforts, all working toward a shared vision of a safer New Jersey. By implementing the recommendations included in this action plan, New Jersey colleges and universities can model how to use data to inform the public health and policy decisions that addresses campus sexual assault at the individual, group, institutional and statewide levels. By embracing a unified, statewide approach, we can more effectively assess the climate surrounding sexual assault, while also strengthening the capacity of our institutions to respond with both proactive measures and compassionate support.

The Commission's recommendations lay the foundation for a statewide strategy that tackles campus sexual assault through comprehensive, data-driven approaches and a commitment to collaboration across institutions. While the diverse nature of New Jersey's higher education landscape presents distinct challenges, it also offers a powerful opportunity: by leveraging shared resources, standardizing climate surveys, and implementing best practices, we can create safer environments for all students. Funding at both the state and institutional levels is essential to support the implementation of climate surveys, train personnel, and develop effective response strategies. Moreover, designating dedicated personnel at the state level to oversee these efforts will ensure they are carried out efficiently and with a cohesive vision.

Our collective responsibility is clear: we must provide every student with the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive on campus free from the trauma of sexual assault. We owe it to our students, and to the future of higher education in New Jersey, to eliminate sexual assault from the college experience once and for all.

Upon publication of the April 2026 Action Plan, the State will initiate a coordinated, four-year implementation cycle to strengthen campus climate assessment and institutional response to campus sexual assault. This cycle is designed to provide clarity, predictability, and shared accountability across institutions of higher education while allowing for continuous improvement and statewide benchmarking.

“ It shouldn't happen to anybody, but because it happened to me I had this mindset like, I have to do something about it, whether it's like helping other people or sharing my story... Every life experience, there's something positive on the other end of it. You built this life, you built this thing, and it comes crumbling down and you can't do anything about it... there's going to be this pile of ashes. But once you clear those ashes away, you have space for something completely new. ”

- Sydney, New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Survivor

Footnotes

- ¹ Krebs, C. P., Lindquist, C. H., Warner, T. D., Fisher, B. S., & Martin, S. L. (2007). The campus sexual assault (CSA) study (Document No. 221153). Retrieved from: <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221153.pdf>
- ² Addressing Campus Sexual Violence, Creating Safer Higher Education Communities. New Jersey Task Force on Campus Sexual Assault Report and Recommendations, June 2017.
- ³ Krebs, C. P., Lindquist, C. H., Warner, T. D., Fisher, B. S., & Martin, S. L. (2007). The campus sexual assault (CSA) study (Document No. 221153) Retrieved from: <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221153.pdf>
- ⁴ "Title IX: How It Affects Survivors of Campus Assault." Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, <https://rainn.org/title-ix>. Accessed 10 Oct. 2024.
- ⁵ Kilpatrick, D.G., Edmunds, C.N., & Seymour, A.K. (1992). Rape in America: A report to the nation. Arlington, VA: National Victim Center and Medical University of South Carolina.
- ⁶ New Jersey has a significant outmigration of college-bound students who leave the state for higher education and do not return after graduation, thereby reducing the pool of skilled workers and young professionals: "In 2022, 31,294 first-time undergraduates left New Jersey, while only 5,420 out-of-state students attended college in New Jersey, resulting in a net migration of -25,874". See: "Most N.J. College-Bound Students Choose to Stay In-State. Here's Why. (Opinion)." NJ.com, Advance Local Media LLC, 23 June 2024, <https://www.nj.com/opinion/2024/06/most-nj-college-bound-students-choose-to-stay-in-state-heres-why-opinion.html>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2024.
- ⁷ See: <https://www.nj.gov/highereducation/stateplan.shtml>
- ⁸ New Jersey Campus Sexual Assault Commission Bylaws, Adopted on November 20, 2021.
- ⁹ New Jersey institutions of higher education licensed by OSHE include twenty-nine (29) public colleges and universities and sixty-one (52) independent (not-for-profit and for-profit) institutions, and as of the 2023-2024 fiscal year, enrolls over 498,208 full-time and part-time credit-seeking students statewide. OSHE licenses out-of-state institutions of higher education who have physical presence in New Jersey at one or more locations within the State. There are approximately eleven (11) additional out-of-state institutions with licensure to offer one or more degrees in the State of New Jersey. *The number of independent institutions includes institutions with multiple campuses as separate institutions, as well as proprietary institutions. **Fiscal year 2024-2025 data is still being finalized at the time of this report.
- ¹⁰ See, [Campus Climate Data Submission Form 2023](#), Issued 03/20/2023.
- ¹¹ McMahon, S., Thomas, S., Maxwell J.A., Cusano, J. Brachmann, A. & Connor, R.A. (2023). A review of US state and federal policies related to campus sexual misconduct surveys. Journal of School Violence. [DOI: 10.1080/15388220.2023.2292716](https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2023.2292716)