

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 16, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write with urgent concern regarding the status of the State Department's efforts to implement Congressional directives to counter sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) globally. High rates of sexual and gender-based violence are linked with greater instability and insecurity, lower economic growth and a vast array of development and health challenges.¹ In the past year alone, conflict-related sexual violence has been employed as a tactic of war in twenty-one countries, destabilizing governance across whole regions by prompting mass displacement and eroding social cohesion.² Lack of accountability for SGBV perpetuates volatility and conflict while inhibiting U.S.-led negotiations and efforts to reach durable peace. The cost of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres amounts to \$1.5 trillion worldwide.³

Congress has recognized SGBV as a national security issue and passed several pertinent bills signed into law by presidents of both parties, including President Trump.⁴ The Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 first required the creation of a strategy to address SGBV, and in August 2012 the State Department and USAID published the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally*. The Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2026 directs State to implement a multi-year strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.⁵ Despite these requirements, the current Trump Administration has

¹United States Department of State and United States Agency for International Development, *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally*, 2022, p. 9,

https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/GBV-Global-Strategy-Report_v6-Accessible-1292022.pdf.

²United Nations, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Cases More Than Doubled in 2025, UN Warns," May 29, 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/05/1167603>.

³U.N. Women, "The Economic Costs of Violence Against Women," September 21, 2016, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/speech-by-lakshmi-puri-on-economic-costs-of-violence-against-women>.

⁴The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-68) directs the Executive Branch to address gendered dimensions of conflict-related sexual violence against civilians; the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-386, as amended) provides significant resources to address sexual and gender-based violence against women, notes that profits from the trafficking industry contribute to the expansion of organized crime in the United States and worldwide, and threatens the rule of law; the Global Fragility Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-94, Division J, Title V) recognizes marginalization of women as a source of violence and fragility, and highlights gender-based violence as an indicator of violence and instability.

⁵Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026, P.L. 119-75, div. F, § 7059(d)(1), 140 Stat. 173, 614 (2026), provided not less than \$187,500,000 to implement a multi-year strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in countries where it is common in conflict and non-conflict settings.

defunded programs, terminated staff, and eliminated the structures responsible for preventing and responding to SGBV.

For instance, as Secretary, you closed the State Department's Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, which led the development and implementation of the U.S. Strategy. The office also led coordination of the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Act, which President Trump signed into law after it passed with robust bipartisan support, including with your strong support. These actions have undermined decades of progress and investment and a Congressional directive, in place since 1994, requiring senior leadership at State be appointed to advance the rights of women and girls.

The Trump Administration closed USAID and effectuated the largest historic decline in foreign assistance in American history as levels of sexual and gender-based violence grew, terminating an estimated \$400 million in SGBV programs, 78 percent of which benefited women and girls impacted by humanitarian crises.⁶ The Administration also cancelled "Safe from the Start" award programming, an initiative first launched in 2013 that aimed to integrate sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response into humanitarian and disaster response from the outset of a crisis. The Administration further failed to integrate the functions ascribed to the shuttered USAID Office of the Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to the newly formed State Department Office of Foreign Assistance Oversight, leaving unanswered how the State Department is designing, monitoring and evaluating the more than \$187.5 million in assistance to support SGBV prevention and response, including to reduce violence against women and girls in Central America, as required by the Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2026.⁷

You have testified to Congress that you are "not abandoning women's issues"⁸ and that the State Department "will continue to address violence against women and girls in disasters and other humanitarian emergencies as core life-saving emergency response activity."⁹ Yet under your leadership, in FY 2025, the State Department obligated only \$29 million for women in humanitarian emergencies¹⁰ and cannot substantiate how it is implementing various directives related to women and girls.

⁶ Women's Refugee Commission, *A Year of Harms: The Impact of U.S. Foreign Aid Cuts on Women and Girls in Humanitarian Crises*, January 2026, <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/year-of-harms>

⁷ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026, P.L. 119-75, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/7148/text>.

⁸ Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, "What Does the State Department's Reorganization Mean for Women, Peace and Security?" June 6, 2025, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/2025/06/06/state-department-reorganization-wps/>.

⁹ Department of State, "Report to Congress on Update to Steps Taken to Address Violence Against Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies," May 2026, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Update-to-Steps-Taken-to-Address-Violence-Against-Women-and-Girls-in-Humanitarian-Emergencies-.pdf>

¹⁰ Department of State, "Report to Congress on Update to Steps Taken to Address Violence Against Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies," May 2026, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Update-to-Steps-Taken-to-Address-Violence-Against-Women-and-Girls-in-Humanitarian-Emergencies-.pdf>

To advance Congressional oversight, we request written responses no later than November 13, 2026, to the following:

1. Provide the status of the State Department's efforts to develop the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence and/or efforts to meet the directive in the enacted Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations law to spend not less than \$187,500,000 to implement a multi-year strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence;
2. Enumerate the Bureaus and Offices implementing SGBV prevention and response efforts;
3. Provide a list of Fiscal Year 2025 and Fiscal Year 2026 programs that support sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response;
4. Provide a list of USAID programs and funding totals that were active when the agency was eliminated; indicate which programs were absorbed by the State Department and the bureaus managing them;
5. Identify by Government-Service level, bureau and office the number of staff working on preventing and responding to SGBV as part of their job description at the State Department and whether any of these staff previously worked at USAID;
6. Explain how the Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response works to address SGBV as a focus for humanitarian and disaster response, and any plans the Bureau has to integrate SGBV prevention and response into its programming;
7. Enumerate how many meetings have taken place since January 2025 across the State Department with women's organizations and civil society working to address SGBV, including in conflict affected countries; and
8. Provide the status of the required report on WPS Act Implementation, including by describing efforts undertaken to promote women's role in efforts to end conflict and/or war.

The abuses that necessitated the creation of the U.S. Strategy have not dissipated and have, in fact, become more acute. The United Nations verified 9,788 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2025, marking a 113 percent increase from the previous year. The overwhelming majority of victims were women and girls, with the real number of total cases being estimated to be ten to twenty times higher, between 97,880 and 195,760.¹¹

¹¹ United Nations, "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Cases More Than Doubled in 2025, UN Warns," May 29, 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/05/1167603>.

The Trump Administration's actions have harmed the U.S. moral authority, undermined U.S. national security and seriously harmed women and girls globally. We urge you to swiftly reverse course and work with Congress to restore this critical work and programming.

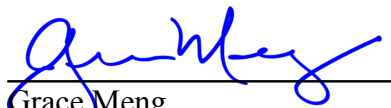
Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



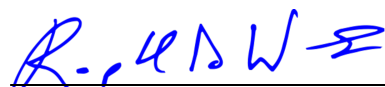
Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



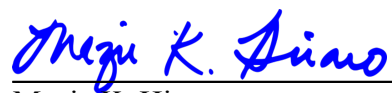
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



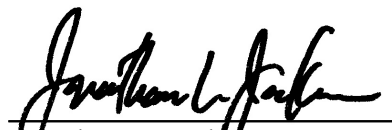
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



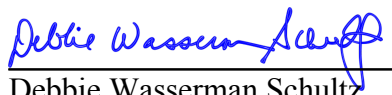
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



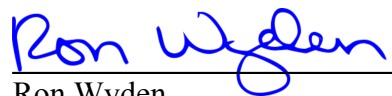
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



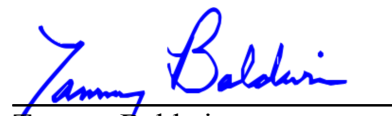
Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



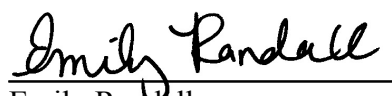
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



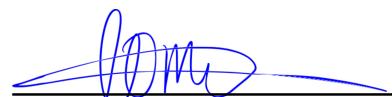
Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



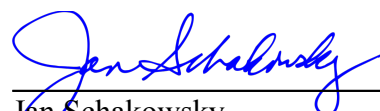
Emily Randall
Member of Congress



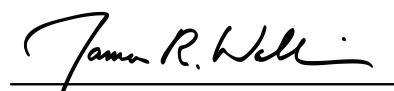
Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



James R. Walkinshaw
Member of Congress



Maxine Dexter, M.D.
Member of Congress



Sarah McBride
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



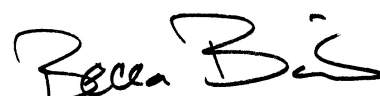
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress



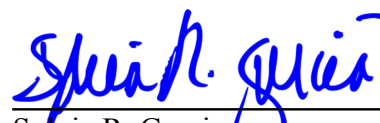
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Becca Balint
Member of Congress



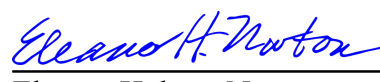
Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



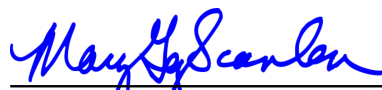
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress