

United States Senate

April 9, 2019

President Lawrence S. Bacow
Office of the President
Harvard University
Massachusetts Hall
Cambridge, MA 02138

An Open Letter to Harvard University,

Single-sex organizations at universities have been an important part of the American tradition since our founding. They offer students the opportunity to form bonds with peers, create professional networks, and assume leadership roles. At the same time, they promote community service and can incentivize academic achievement.

Federal law recognizes the positive role that such organizations can take at universities. Indeed, under Title IX, the federal law that prohibits gender discrimination in higher education, Congress specifically exempts “the membership practices of a social fraternity or social sorority”

It’s disappointing to see, then, that Harvard has decided to make every effort to disband single-sex organizations – both on and off-campus. The university has gone so far as to sanction students for belonging to single-sex organizations that are off-campus and unrecognized by the university. It has banned students who belong to such organizations from “hold[ing] leadership positions in recognized student organizations or athletic teams” and has declared these students “will not be eligible to receive College-Administered fellowships.”

Harvard’s actions appear to be fueled by its animus toward all-male social organizations – a constituency Harvard blames for sexual assaults.¹ We should all be extremely concerned about the prevalence of sexual assaults on campuses and work to prevent them; however, these assaults are not unique to single-sex social organizations. They are a symptom of a larger cultural problem on college campuses that universities must work to address in a thoughtful way. Harvard’s actions are a superficial solution to a far more complex issue.

In its wake, Harvard’s senseless decision is harming the very class of students it claims to be helping. Women’s organizations have been collateral damage and have been forced to integrate or, in some cases, close. Single-sex women’s organizations are places where women feel safe, forge lifelong friendships, and build important professional networks. Colleges and universities should encourage these groups that are so important to building confidence among young women.

¹ Laura Krantz, *Sex assault prevention report highlights Harvard ‘final clubs,’* The Boston Globe (March 8, 2016), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/03/08/sex-assault-prevention-report-highlights-harvard-final-clubs/KSELbVQeEax90SohLJOwEN/story.html>

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The university's decision also raises serious concerns about how far an institution like Harvard will go in its agenda of progressive social engineering. For example, will it ban Catholic organizations such as the all-male Knights of Columbus or the all-female Daughters of Isabella? At what point will Harvard interfere in student membership in religious or political organizations it deems undesirable?

We cannot cure social ills by rejecting the natural human desire to form bonds among single-sex groups. As a member of Phi Delta Theta Fraternity and an attendee of an all-male undergraduate institution, I treasure the friendships I made and value the opportunities it allowed me to grow. I would hope Harvard reconsiders its position after seeing the harm this decision will bring to its student body.

Sincerely,



Mike Braun
United States Senator
Indiana