

# Bill aims to stop DeVos' plan to change campus sex-assault policies

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., proposed legislation Tuesday to stop Education Secretary Betsy DeVos from advancing rules that critics say could hurt efforts to fight sexual harassment and assaults on college campuses.

Slotkin is one of several Democrats in the House, including New Hampshire's Annie Kuster, pushing a bill that would prevent the Education Department from implementing proposed rule changes to Title IX, the regulation that sets policies on sex discrimination and assaults at educational institutions receiving federal funds.

DeVos last year proposed changes to Title IX in response to those made years earlier during President Barack Obama's administration to force colleges and universities to take a stronger approach to handling accusations of sexual assault and harassment.

Critics argue DeVos' plan, which has not been finalized, would go too far in the other direction, raising legal standards for what constitutes sexual harassment, increasing due process rights for those accused and making it harder for accusers to report and prosecute claims on college campuses. They also argue the definition of what qualifies as harassment would be narrowed and colleges and universities would have to respond to fewer kinds of claims.

"I have done everything I can think of to appeal to Secretary DeVos to change course," said Slotkin, whose district includes Michigan State University, where sports medicine doctor Larry Nassar worked before being sent to prison amid hundreds of allegations of sexual assault. "Given that (she) insists on moving forward, I felt compelled to introduce this legislation that prevents those rules from taking effect."

Slotkin said she has met personally with DeVos on the proposed rules and asked for changes to no avail. The Education Department has maintained that the changes — which could happen by the end of the year — are needed to balance a system that has favored accusers over the accused and led to confusion among college administrators.

But Slotkin has argued the proposed changes could specifically impact those women assaulted by Nassar by shielding Michigan State from certain liabilities or allowing the university to ignore certain claims against him. The university has already been ordered to pay a record \$4.5 million fine by the Education Department for its handling of the Nassar case.

Still, the legislation is likely to face hurdles. While a Democratic-controlled House could presumably pass it in 2020, Republicans still are in the majority in the U.S. Senate and have been less critical of DeVos' proposals to change Title IX.

Slotkin introduced the legislation Tuesday along with Kuster and Democratic Reps. Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts and Jackie Speier of California.