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MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Students and Victims Deserve Better

I am a mother, with one daughter in college and another starting next fall. I am also an educator, with my passion centered on students and their success. I am now a state Representative and the current chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education. I speak from all of these roles when I say I could not be more disappointed in one of our state universities for their undeniable mishandling of sexual assault cases on campus.

I am consistently going to bat in Lansing for the higher education system in our state. We have fifteen unique public universities that place Michigan on the map when it comes to educating and training the next generation. My argument for increased state investment into our education system has always highlighted our great institutions, each one of them striving to unlock the full potential of our students and our state.

But being their strongest advocate also means I am responsible for holding them accountable when the time comes. For Michigan State University, our state's largest school, that time is now.

Michigan State University has demonstrated an unacceptable inability to provide justice for victims of sexual assault on its campus. Their handling of the Dr. Nassar case has lacked not only transparency, but accountability. The one hundred and twenty plus victims of Dr. Nassar deserve better. The many others who have experienced sexual assault on their campus deserve better. And the tens of thousands of students who will attend their institution and trust it as their home deserve better.

As Chair of Higher Education, my goal from the start has been to make campuses in our state safe environments where our sons and daughters can learn and succeed. Earlier this spring, I drafted language into my higher education budget that required Michigan's public universities to send their Title IX reports to the state legislature for review. My hope at the time was to bring this issue to the forefront and start a discussion in the Legislature on how we can make our campuses a safer place for our children. As it turns out, it was the *absence* of a report at Michigan State that has now made the discussion unavoidable.

As legislators, we need to identify ways to make sure victims know and understand the disclosure process when they are ready to share, and we need to make sure our public institutions are ready to listen and respond with the right services when that time comes. Additionally, we must also look into

how our universities conduct their reviews to ensure there is a uniform and thorough process at each school. Victims deserve a clear, easy to use, and responsive system.

The simple truth is we cannot allow something this serious to be mishandled ever again. In my role as Chair, I will use every resource at my disposal make sure of that. I plan to hold hearings, get answers, and find solutions to prevent this kind of negligence.

No matter what changes take place, students must be the focus of any reform, and my hope is to implement improved policies as part of this spring's annual state budget process.

As for Michigan State, I believe they need to undergo a complete culture change before any healing can begin. As part of this, President Lou Anna K. Simon should seriously consider resigning.

While the board has expressed continued confidence, those of us watching around the state have lost ours. MSU must be careful to avoid the impression that the school has done more to protect their president and their image than to protect the victims of assault on their campus. As of now, everyone from students to the victims of assault believes that is the case. And why wouldn't they when in the very midst of calls for her resignation, the board opted to give her a raise instead.

My youngest daughter will be starting college in a few short years. For her sake, and for thousands of others, I pray that the future on college campuses is drastically different than it is in today's world. Failing these students once was unacceptable. Public institutions in this state must never fail them again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim LaSata". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kim LaSata  
State Representative  
District 79