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House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
“Sexual Harassment at the Department of the Interior”

Chairman Cox, Ranking Member Gohmert, and Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. I stated throughout my confirmation process that helping to eradicate the Department of the Interior’s ongoing sexual harassment problem would be a priority for me. Therefore, it is fitting that my first testimony as Inspector General is about this important challenge, and the role the Office of Inspector General (OIG) can play in improving the culture at the Department of the Interior.

The OIG has taken a leadership role in identifying these problems over the last 4 years. In 2016, the OIG published an investigative report about widespread sexual misconduct at the Grand Canyon. That investigation sounded the alarm: there was a deep problem here. The investigation revealed that Park Service personnel had engaged in a long-term pattern of sexual harassment and fostered a hostile work environment in the Grand Canyon River District. In all, we identified almost 3 dozen individuals who endured or observed mistreatment ranging from verbal harassment to sexual assault at the Grand Canyon. Our investigation also highlighted a disturbing absence of strong leadership, which allowed the harassment to continue unchecked for 15 years.

The Grand Canyon investigation led to others. In total, the OIG has opened 22 sexual harassment investigations since 2016. We have uncovered sexual misconduct in parks as large as Yellowstone, and as small as Canaveral National Seashore; in a remote Bureau of Indian Affairs office and at the DOI headquarters; in locations stretching across the country from Georgia to Oregon; and involving behavior ranging from disturbing, inappropriate touching to outright sexual assault.

The Department—to its credit—has taken disciplinary action against 35 subjects as a result of OIG investigations and agency referrals. Sixteen of those 35 employees are no longer in Government service because they were removed, they resigned, or they retired while under investigation. The Department also took steps to change the culture. Just months after we published our Grand Canyon investigation, Secretary Jewell created an Employment and Labor Law Unit and released a new anti-harassment policy. DOI later conducted a Work Environment Survey, and Secretaries Zinke and Bernhardt took a number of meaningful actions to further address the problem.

As part of the OIG’s ongoing mission to monitor the Department’s progress, we recently released our evaluation of the DOI’s efforts to address sexual harassment. We found that the DOI has taken meaningful steps to address sexual harassment by investigating complaints, issuing policies, requiring training, conducting surveys, establishing an advisory hotline, as well as developing a tracking system. All these measures aim to provide a safe work environment, encourage victims to report incidents, and improve management’s preparation to address and investigate allegations brought to their attention.

We also found, however, there is more work to do. As we state in our evaluation, the DOI has an opportunity to improve sexual harassment investigations that it conducts or contracts:

1. Reports of investigation from the Department’s investigators or their contractors do not always contain the necessary information for decisionmakers and advisors to make comprehensive decisions about potential corrective action. As a result, no action is taken, victims never see the resolution they deserve, and those who should be held accountable continue on without repercussions.
2. The DOI and its bureaus are not consistently tracking the timeliness of investigations.
3. Investigation costs may prevent employees from reporting an incident. The cost impact of an unforeseen, unbudgeted investigation on smaller offices can impact their ability to fund other activities such as training, travel, and awards.

We made 11 recommendations in this evaluation, the Department has resolved and implemented 3 of them, and has implementation plans for the remaining 8.¹ By making these improvements, the DOI could foster a safer working environment that seeks to reduce incidents of sexual harassment and improperly handled sexual harassment complaints.

As the Department continues its anti-harassment efforts, the OIG will remain committed to this issue. We currently have 8 active cases and we will report on those upon completion. In addition, next month we will release our *Top Management Challenges* report, which will include a “Workplace Culture and Human Capital” section that highlights how the negative effects of harassment are widespread and sap productivity and trust out of an organization.

The OIG is exploring additional ways to add value in the future. For instance, the OIG is considering:

- Verifying whether the Department completed and tracked the mandatory training of supervisors – especially in its remote locations.
- Conducting bureau-level inspections or evaluations to identify whether and to what extent bureaus have implemented their formal action plans to address and prevent sexual harassment. This could include focusing on specific offices/locations that are at risk under EEOC-identified risk factors for harassment.
- Reviewing the misconduct tracking system (I-MART) to determine its effectiveness regarding what data is collected, its reporting features, the quality of the data, and whether it is consistently being used (as required).
- Tracking the continued expansion of the Employment and Labor Law Unit and its dedicated specialists.

¹ In addition to the 11 recommendations, we believe that the DOI should consider (1) including strategies to specifically address the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s organizational risk factors in bureau action plans; and (2) formalizing the sharing of information about prior or pending allegations between bureaus.

I commit to you that the OIG, under my watch, will continue to aid the Department in its efforts to foster a safe work environment free of sexual harassment and assault. And to all survivors and witnesses who may be listening today, please come forward through the OIG hotline or the departmental avenues available to you. OIG investigators take this work to heart and understand that this is a very personal issue. In fact, the supervisor of a survivor in one of our cases wrote:

I cannot say enough positive things about [OIG agents] or the way they interacted with both myself and [the survivor]. Their professionalism, tact, and responsiveness were eclipsed only by the gentle compassion and care with which they interacted with [the survivor].

We strive to have that impact on every case.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.