

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

#### H.R. 653, the Federal Intern Protection Act

March 8, 2017

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for bringing my legislation, H.R. 653, before the Committee for consideration.

Unpaid interns work in federal agencies every day. They do this work to acquire experience and contacts to help them pursue their career dreams, which hopefully include working for the federal government!

The federal workers that mentor these unpaid interns are protected from discrimination and sexual harassment by federal law. Unfortunately, due to a loophole in existing law, unpaid interns are not protected from discrimination and sexual harassment.

This Committee has held a number of oversight hearings on employee misconduct. In some instances, the misconduct involved the sexual harassment of interns. Witness testimony has included allegations of unwanted touching and uninvited sexual advances. Mr. Chairman, having heard that testimony, now is the time to make reforms.

My bill, H.R. 653, would include interns under the existing protections for employees, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of religion, race, and gender, just as it is currently illegal to discriminate against or harass other workers in the federal government on these bases. We are simply closing a loophole in existing policy.

I am glad we were able to come together today to support this legislation, which passed both this Committee and the entire House unanimously in the last Congress.

And I want to thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for working with me in a bipartisan way on this bill.

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