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***I'm With Them* Grades Fortune 10 Companies on Availability of Sexual Misconduct Hotline**

“Bridging the Gap in Reporting Sexual Misconduct” identifies barriers to accessing hotlines and reporting misconduct; Walmart (WMT), Exxon Mobil (XOM), Berkshire Hathaway (BRK.A), McKesson (MCK) and AT&T (T) rank highest for ease of finding reporting hotline

Orange, CA – June 6, 2019 – *I'm With Them*, the nonprofit whose mission is to reduce work-related sexual misconduct, today announced a report, [“Bridging the Gap in Reporting Sexual Misconduct,”](#) that rates the Top 10 U.S. companies on how easy it is to find their anonymous reporting hotlines.

The study looked at Google search results for each company with the company’s name and the words “anonymous hotline.” Of the ten companies evaluated, *I'm With Them* gave five – Walmart, Exxon Mobil, Berkshire Hathaway, McKesson and AT&T – an A-, the highest grade. This grade was given because searching returned the phone number in the top one or two search results, though there were ambiguities about features of the anonymous reporting service. Three companies received a “D” because their numbers could not be found. One company, UnitedHealth Group (UNH), received an F.

While much coverage of why workplace sexual misconduct is under-reported focuses on the psychology of the victim or survivor, the report highlights a significant barrier to reporting: mechanisms are hard to find and access. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act¹ requires that companies have an anonymous system for reporting ethical concerns that could result in financial impact to the company. Many companies have chosen to implement an anonymous phone line through which complaints are compiled into reports and then channeled to the Audit Committee.

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, it has become clear that sexual misconduct has the potential to have a material impact on a company’s management and finances. Importantly, the hotline has the potential to serve as a vital resource for affiliates on the periphery of a company, such as interviewees, consultants, customers and suppliers who don’t have access to internal HR-supported resources, for reporting misconduct. If companies are sincere about wanting to know about misconduct, *I'm With Them* believes hotlines should:

- Come up as the first search result, with clear language about their features;

- Be clearly identified as a way to report sexual misconduct;
- Be made accessible to non-employees; and
- Be marketed with encouragement to report, not discouragement.

“Victims and survivors are too often discouraged from reporting,” said *I’m With Them* President Laurie Girand. “These hotlines may be the only way for affiliates to inform a company of bad actors. If companies and audit committees want to know about people’s experiences, they need to build a bridge to their reporting mechanisms and put a freeway sign up that says they exist. The report explains how to encourage traffic across that bridge.”

The report identified a number of ways in which companies discouraged reporting, including not referencing that the hotline was an avenue for reporting sexual misconduct, positioning the line as exclusively for ethics violations, limiting the hotline to employees, and giving the hotline euphemistic and confusing names, such as “Ethics & Help Center,” “Helpline,” and “Awareline,” which did not identify it as a reporting mechanism. One company presented its reporting system with ominous messages like, “Am I certain my actions are legal?” and “Will I sleep soundly at night?”

In addition to the suffering of victims, survivors and their colleagues, instances of sexual misconduct cost companies in lost productivity and employees. Repairing cultures of misconduct can cause massive disruption to business operations. A single serial perpetrator can expose a company to millions in settlements or even bankruptcy. The report offers actionable steps companies can take to encourage reporting sexual misconduct through their anonymous hotlines.

To view the full report visit: <https://imwiththem.org/articles/bridging-the-gap-in-reporting-sexual-misconduct>

¹Section 301 of the Sarbanes Oxley Act of 2002 requires that audit committees of the Board of Directors of publicly-held companies have “confidential, anonymous” procedures for employees to submit “concerns regarding questionable accounting or auditing matters.”

About *I’m With Them*

I’m With Them is a non-profit organization whose mission is to reduce work-related sexual misconduct. Its website, <https://www.ImWithThem.org>, unites survivors and victims and breaks through barriers of isolation and doubt, empowering them to share substantiation and coordinate approaches to better achieve their justice goals. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @ImWithThemTOO.