

The Joint Committee on Legislative Management Informational Hearing
The Connecticut General Assembly's Sexual Harassment Policy
April 16, 2018
Written Testimony of Jillian Gilchrest, MSW

Senators Looney and Fasano, Representative Aresimowicz, and members of the Joint Committee on Legislative Management, my name is Jillian Gilchrest and I am a resident of West Hartford and a former employee of Legislative Management. During the last ten years I have advocated for legislation at the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) on behalf of a number of issues, in particular women's health, safety and economic security. I am submitting written testimony today in support of a clear CGA process for reporting and investigating complaints of sexual harassment involving lawmakers.

In 2016, as the Senior Policy Analyst for the Connecticut General Assembly's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (now the Commission on Women, Children, and Seniors), I was required to take sexual harassment training. During the training, I asked Legislative Management what a staff member or outside lobbyist should do if a lawmaker sexually harasses them. I was told nothing, because technically lawmakers are not employees of the CGA. I was shocked – especially considering the power dynamics between lawmakers, staff, and lobbyists. If the CGA hasn't received many complaints of sexual harassment perpetrated by lawmakers, as was stated by those in Leadership at the CGA, I see that as an indication that the policy is not strong, not that sexual harassment isn't taking place.

Since taking the CGA sexual harassment training, I have been informed by a former colleague that the CGA's daily Bulletin includes a section on sexual harassment which directs people with complaints against a lawmaker to talk to the Chief of Staff for the offending lawmaker's caucus or a designated staff member of the opposite sex. The Chief of Staff holds a great deal of power, including over policy decisions and priorities. It may prove difficult for a staff member or lobbyist to report sexual harassment or abuse perpetrated by a lawmaker to the lawmaker's Chief of Staff. For those working to move a piece of legislation through the CGA, it would be hard to report sexual harassment to the same person you need to meet with about legislation.

The Bulletin is also unclear as to what happens once a complaint is made. Does each caucus have their own sexual harassment policy? How are complaints investigated and who conducts the investigation? What supports or services does the caucus offer to the individual making the complaint? If an investigation is conducted and it is then determined that the lawmaker committed sexual harassment, what actions can the

caucus take? Is this information posted anywhere for staff and lobbyists to review? None of this is clear in the Bulletin.

I'm happy to see that the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) is speaking at today's Informational Hearing on the Connecticut General Assembly's Sexual Harassment Policy. NCSL conducted a survey to learn more information on legislative policies on sexual harassment in October of 2017 and has a list of key policy elements on their website as well as model policy from five states. Connecticut lawmakers should also look to the law they passed in 2014, *Public Act 14-11, AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL ASSAULT, STALKING AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS* as a model. Many of the best practices included in PA 14-11 can be adapted for a CGA sexual harassment policy.

I recommend that the Joint Committee on Legislative Management create a policy to be followed by all four caucuses for reporting and investigating complaints of sexual harassment involving lawmakers that is made available to the public which includes; (1) easily accessible and detailed procedures that someone making a complaint of sexual harassment may follow if an incident has taken place; (2) a diversity of contacts within the legislature to whom sexual harassment can be reported, including non-partisan staff; (3) information on the availability of support services for the individual making the report, such as the Alliance to End Sexual Violence; (4) a summary of disciplinary procedures including detailed information on who and how an investigation will be conducted and what possible disciplinary actions may be taken as a result of the investigation; and (5) an anonymous reporting option.

The CGA must create a culture in which staff and lobbyists feel safe reporting a sexual harassment complaint against a lawmaker, and not like their job or bill will be placed in jeopardy. A clear process for reporting and investigating complaints of sexual harassment involving lawmakers is a positive step in the right direction toward truly making the CGA the people's building.

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