

# CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Support. Advocate. Prevent.

**Testimony of Laura Cordes, Executive Director  
Sexual Harassment Policy Informational Hearing  
Joint Committee on Legislative Management  
Monday, April 16, 2018**

Good afternoon, Senator Looney, Senator Fasano, Representative Aresimowicz and members of the Joint Committee on Legislative Management. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today as you explore additional policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual harassment.

The Alliance is the statewide coalition of nine community-based sexual assault crisis services centers which provide trauma informed and victim centered frontline support to thousands of child, adolescent and adult victims and survivors of sexual violence each year. We are also the state's leading provider of sexual violence prevention education and training programs which reach an average of 50,000 residents each year. Last year the certified sexual assault crisis counselors and advocates at our member centers and those who work with the state's probation and parole sex offender supervision and management units served over 7200 survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones.

The millions of #MeToo stories shared by courageous survivors starkly illustrate that women and girls, in particular, (although men and boys are victimized too) are subject to harassment, discrimination, unwanted touching and violence at nearly every age and stage of their lives: on the street, in the home, on trains, at school, on the playground, and in the workplace.

As lawmakers, and state leaders, you are in the unique position to develop and utilize best and promising practices in sexual harassment prevention and response, and to assess and reassess the impact of your work. What is modeled in this building should serve as a model for other institutions and organizations in the state.

We applaud your effort to gather through an anonymous survey, input from third parties (lobbyists, consultants and other members of the public) who may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences directly or publicly) and your willingness to open the door to a richer discussion about what the General Assembly can do to uphold a zero tolerance policy and to support those who experience harassment of discrimination.

Workplace sexual harassment remains a persistent and underreported problem. While we often think of it as an expression of sexism it can also be an expression of racism, classism, ableism, and/or homophobia which disproportionately impacts people of color, low wage workers, people with disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQ, and people who are, or are perceived to be, gender non-conforming.

The report from the federal government's own *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace Report* Report of Co-Chairs Chai R. Feldblum & Victoria A. Lipnic (2016) found a wide range of prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace, impacting upwards of 85% of women.

- *Forty percent of women experience unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion, even if they don't label it as "sexual harassment," and 60% of women experience unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion, or sexually crude conduct or sexist comments in the workplace.*
- *Additionally the report shows that upwards of 85% of people who experience workplace harassment never file a formal legal charge and approximately 70% of employees never disclose to a manager, supervisor or union representative. They fear loss of their job, or a promotion and retaliation should they report.*

The fears that stop most employees from reporting harassment are well-founded. One 2003 study found that 75% of employees who spoke out against workplace mistreatment faced some form of retaliation.

The emotional, social, economic, and professional costs are high. People who are sexually harassed are forced to short cut their education, miss out on opportunities for advancement, and quit jobs and careers they love.

Despite a lack of formal complaints there is no reason to believe that acts of sexual harassment do not take place. This is a critical time employ new ways to ensure that the right work in an environment free from harassment, intimidation and/or discrimination is realized for all of Connecticut employees.

According to the EEOC, "the cornerstone of a successful harassment prevention strategy is the consistent and demonstrated commitment of senior leaders to create and maintain a culture in which harassment is not tolerated."<sup>1</sup> Although a clear comprehensive sexual harassment policy is an essential component in preventing harassment, any policy's effectiveness is ultimately a function of the cultural norms that leaders foster in their organizations.

As you again re-examine policies to ensure that training, procedures and actions are clear, transparent and fair, we encourage you to consider the utilization of the following:

## **CLIMATE SURVEYS**

The use of online anonymous climate surveys can both measure the extent to which harassment is a problem, and whether or not the reporting process is accessible and supportive to employees or clients. Publicized results from periodic surveys can also help demonstrate the commitment from leadership to fostering a culture of respect and civility through ongoing assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Labor, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment" (Nov.20, 2017)



### THIRD PARTY OPTIONS FOR DISCLOSING, REPORTING, and COMPLAINT PROCESS

Beyond overcoming fears of retaliation, being scrutinized or not believed, many victims of workplace harassment do not disclose or report harassment because they are unsure how their information will be shared and what the complaint process will look like. Internal and external confidential third parties should be made available (in person or through a hotline) to help victims explore their options and connect them with support. Additionally given the unique power and political dynamic within the General Assembly itself, members should consider contracting with an independent third party to oversee the complaint process for sexual harassment to help ensure that there is no actual or perceived bias nor a conflict in investigations and disciplinary determinations.

### BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING

All employees should learn about the behaviors that are accepted and expected in the workplace and be empowered as potential bystanders to help create a respectful and inclusive environment. Active bystanders can uphold a culture of respect and civility in the workplace by validating and supporting a colleague who experiences harassment and/or intervening or challenging the inappropriate behaviors that lead to ongoing harassment and discrimination.

The Alliance encourages the General Assembly to offer bystander or upstander training, similar to trainings held by The Alliance in partnership with the General Assembly for male lawmakers during the 2014 and 2016 sessions. These trainings, which are part of The Alliance and Men Can Stop Rape *Where Do You Stand CT?* Campaign utilize scenario based role plays and discussion to help participants intervene and prevent harm to others when they witnessing negative behaviors.

A safe and healthy workplace is one in which no employee is concerned for their physical or emotional well-being while doing their job. We applaud your efforts to create and maintain safe and healthy workplaces for all of Connecticut employees including those who work in the Legislative Office Building and State Capitol.

The Alliance and our member programs stand ready to offer our assistance as you continue this important work.

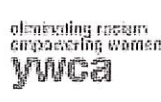
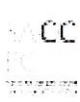
Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence

Our Member Centers



[EndSexualViolenceCT.org](http://EndSexualViolenceCT.org)