

April 1, 2019

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB-3: AN ACT COMBATting SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Dear Chairpersons Winfield and Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, Vice Chairs Bergstein and Blumenthal, and all other Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Kathleen Callahan and I live in Stratford, Connecticut. I am here to voice my strong support for SB-3: *An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment*. I am grateful to be employed by Connecticut Women's Consortium, an organization that is known and respected for expertise in workplace culture change and the promotion of and a commitment to creating environments that are trauma-informed. That is, they are safe, trustworthy, collaborative, empowering, and gender-responsive. A culture of diversity and inclusion is fostered in such environments that by their nature, discourage sexual harassment. As we intensify our efforts, it is essential that appropriate policies, workforce training, and support for those who experience sexual harassment are firmly established. This bill will provide that and more.

Allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct by powerful figures were publicly revealed over recent years and initiated a national dialog that continues as employers reevaluate their anti-harassment policies and their training compliance. We are amid a national reckoning, a collective awareness of systemic abuses of power as allegations are bolstered by corroboration from multiple sources.

In June 2016, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) released findings from their Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace, calling for a "reboot" of traditional workplace prevention efforts<sup>1</sup>. The report is grounded in key findings that workplace harassment is persistent and often unreported; that businesses also suffer due to decreased productivity, increased turnover, and reputational harm; that leadership endorsement is crucial for accountability and commitment; and that training must change by exploring new and different approaches.

The Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) has reported the number of complaints alleging sexual harassment in the 2018 fiscal year rose by nearly 62% over 2017 and there are reasons to believe cases will continue to rise<sup>2</sup>. This is not unexpected and mirrors national trends, where people are empowered to report incidents previously overlooked, as long as the employee feels safe from retribution.

Yet, results from an October 2018 report from the national Society for Human Resource Management as part of its Harassment-Free Workplace Series is disheartening. Over 66% of employer

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (2016, June). *Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace*. Retrieved from [https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task\\_force/harassment/upload/report.pdf](https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_force/harassment/upload/report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. (2018, October 29). *Annual Reports*. Retrieved from <https://www.ct.gov/chro/cwp/view.asp?a=2523&Q=315780>.

executive respondents have made no or little change to their behavior and of the 33% that did report changes, their comments illuminated the need to enhance our prevention and employee support efforts. Comments include the perception that employees use claims of sexual harassment as an excuse for poor performance and a reason to blame others; that there is no need for prevention training because it doesn't happen within their workplace; and that men have changed behavior by not talking to women and being scared to have casual conversations<sup>3</sup>.

In closing, there is much work to be done and SB-3 is necessary for Connecticut's workforce and all our employers. I strongly support other critical issues addressed regarding statute of limitations and urge you to vote in favor of this bill.

With respect and gratitude for your service and consideration,

Kathleen Callahan  
Connecticut Women's Consortium  
NASW/CT  
Stratford, CT 06614  
Kathleen.callahan.new@gmail.com  
203.209.8055

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<sup>3</sup> Society for Human Resource Management. (2018, October). *Harassment-Free Workplace Series: The Executive View*. Retrieved from <https://shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/Documents/Harassment-Free-Workplace-Series-Executive-View-Topline.pdf>.