



State of Connecticut
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

450 Columbus Blvd., Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103
Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing – April 1, 2019
CHRO Testimony in Support of
S.B. 3, An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Good Morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Tanya Hughes, and I am the Executive Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. I am accompanied by Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of S.B. 3, An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment.

The CHRO supports the many aspects of S.B. 3 that aim to combat sexual harassment in the workplace. The #MeToo and #TimesUp movements have called necessary attention to harassment that can occur in workplaces. While increased awareness is critical, action is needed to ensure that sexual harassment is not just identified, but completely eliminated.¹ Today we would like to highlight certain aspects of S.B. 3 which aim to make that goal a reality.

One way S.B. 3 works toward eliminating sexual harassment is to expand the kinds of employees who are required to receive training and information. For example, the bill would require that training be provided not only to new supervisors, but to any new employee, within a period of time after hire that corresponds to the size of the employer. Employers would also be required to provide periodic supplemental training for all employees no less than every 10 years.

S.B. 3 also amplifies the CHRO's existing role in providing information and training on sexual harassment. The bill calls for us to put information directly on our website, a link to which can then be distributed by employers to their employees via email, text message, or printout. S.B. 3 also calls for us to develop online training tools which employers can use to provide the required training for their supervisors and employees. While we already provide free training to businesses across Connecticut through our Business Training Institute, we welcome the opportunity to make that training even more convenient and accessible to employers through the use of technology.

Other aspects of S.B. 3 are designed to remove barriers that may inhibit victims of sexual harassment from coming forward and reporting it to their employers. For example, the bill prohibits an employer from responding to a sexual harassment complaint by substantively altering the working conditions of the reporting employee without their written consent. It also ensures that statements or documents obtained by an EEO officer in the course of investigating a discrimination complaint against a state agency will remain confidential, except to those investigating the complaint or to the CHRO.

¹ Evening Sentinel v. Nat'l Org. for Women, 168 Conn. 26, 34 (1975) (Connecticut antidiscrimination law "evidences a firm commitment not only to end discrimination against women, but also to do away with sex discrimination altogether."); Thibodeau v. Design Group One Architects, LLC, 260 Conn. 691, 706 (2002) ("[T]here exists a general public policy in this state to eliminate all forms of invidious discrimination, including sex discrimination....").

Finally, when sexual harassment does occur, S.B. 3 enhances the avenues available to victims to pursue the remedies available to them and be made whole. One way it does so is by increasing the timeframe for filing an employment discrimination complaint with the CHRO from 180 days to 300 days. This would match the CHRO filing timeframe with the timeframe for complaints filed with the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Another way is by facilitating the process by which complaints can ultimately be resolved. For example, when caseloads are high and as the CHRO's budget allows, S.B. 3 would permit the CHRO to utilize the services of magistrate judges, so that cases can be heard and decided more swiftly. The bill would also authorize new tools for ensuring that public hearing cases are not held up by gridlock over document requests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and we are happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.