



## **Ending Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Maryland**

One doesn't need to drive 2,700 hundred miles away to Hollywood casting couches to experience a workplace culture that condones sexual harassment. Nearly half of all women in the workforce say they have "personally experienced an unwelcome sexual advance or verbal or physical harassment at work," and 17% of American women survive sexual violence in their lifetime. Every 98 seconds in our nation, another American woman is sexually assaulted.

Those in power, from Hollywood executives to officials in government, continue to normalize this degradation of colleagues and co-workers. Just like Hollywood, there is a well-documented political culture of misogyny and objectification that allows sexual harassment to persist, despite the long-term, dogged efforts of organizations like the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Women's Law Center, and political leadership from the Women Legislators of Maryland—who have been focusing on this issue even before it was the subject of a national spotlight. By condoning inappropriate touching, sexual comments, innuendo, jokes about assault, and conversations in the workplace or social settings about sexual conquest (so-called "locker room talk"), bystanders tacitly permit the sexual harassment in which their peers engage. This misogynist culture is reflected in Maryland continuing to be one of the only states that gives parental rights to rapists.

Much of the problem is rooted in the creation of artificial gender roles of "masculine" and "feminine," which have associated human sexuality with dominance and submission rather than with cooperation and mutual respect. Those seen as having less power—because of gender, youth, race, class, ethnicity, or subordinate position—experience higher rates of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment than do those in positions of equal or greater power. Therefore, my administration will pay particular attention to schools and campuses, and to restaurants, hospitality services, and other areas of employment where workers are especially vulnerable. Further, we will focus on corporate settings and government offices, as well as prisons and other state facilities where power dynamics are particularly pronounced.

Fortunately, nearly two-thirds of Americans now view workplace harassment as a serious issue. Individuals of all genders can be affected, regardless of their politics, socioeconomic status, or position in society. Though more rare, women have also abused positions of power. Indeed, one of the first court judgments under sexual harassment law was against a woman who made sexual demands of a male subordinate.

Although there is more work to do, Maryland has several important laws and administrative policies on the books intended to address sexual harassment and assault. For example, in the last few General Assembly sessions, laws have passed to remove legal requirements that forced women to prove that they "fought back" in order to secure a rape conviction (SB217/HB429) and ensure that unpaid interns are protected under the law (2015 HB229/SB604). However, laws and policies are only words on a page, if we do not address the cultural norms perpetuating sexual harassment and violence to in our culture.

It is time for all Marylanders to stand up and ensure that sexual harassment and assault is rooted out once and for all, starting with state government. As a survivor myself, this is a personal issue for me, and my administration will ensure that the State of Maryland is the national leader in respecting women in the workplace and ending the culture of secrecy, fear, and shame. As Governor, I will:

- 1. Create dedicated Office of Sexual Harassment and Violence:** Under my administration, Maryland will become the first State to have an Office of Sexual Harassment and Violence, reporting directly to the Governor's office. It will provide survivors a dedicated agency that ensures anonymity and is easy to access. The Office will coordinate among state and federal agencies and local governments to ensure that reports of harassment and assault are acted upon promptly, that survivors receive the support they need, and that repeat predators are detected through innovative technologies, like those being pioneered by organizations like Callisto. The Office will also implement a comprehensive set of reporting standards and provide support services that are designed in collaboration with the leading experts from non-profit organizations, the private sector, government, and academia. My administration will ask all private companies to publicly post information in their offices on both employees' rights and the avenues to report inappropriate behavior. The Office will also help prepare organizations for common reactions from sexual offenders when they are held accountable, including to "deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender" (DARVO).

Four additional responsibilities will become defining hallmarks of the Office's work:

- a. Provide independent audits and certify gold-standard employers:** Maryland will become the first state in the nation to reward companies working to actively eliminate sexual harassment from the workplace. The Office will offer to conduct independent audits and provide incentives for companies that audit and monitor sexual harassment of employees at every level, from hourly staff to C-suite executives. Companies that successfully create cultural change by executing a series of steps, outlined by the Governor's office, will receive public recognition and other benefits. Firms able to lower their rates of sexual harassment to near-zero levels will receive a workplace certification and preference in government procurement. The state will also provide support for organizations to receive trainings, such as those led by A Call To Men and Mentoring Violence Prevention, intended to create cultural change and reduce harassment in the workplace.
- b. Create anonymous hotline and wraparound support services for survivors:** Survivors and witnesses of sexual harassment should never have to worry about whether they will receive the support they need when reporting an incident through appropriate administrative channels. My administration will make reporting and receiving support easy and anonymous, so when sexual harassment does occur, survivors are empowered with the resources they need to move forward with their lives. The Office will make sure complaints are handled seriously and with sensitivity, and that survivors know their rights and their options under the law. Further, the office will ensure that survivors receive all available responsive resources, including counseling, education, legal assistance, and help with medical bills and lost wages (we will build upon the successful collaborative model of the Montgomery County Family Justice Center statewide).

- c. **Oversee an internal audit of state government:** My administration will lead by example by having all the entire executive branch of state government undergo a sexual harassment audit by a third-party evaluator. The overall results will be made public in a manner that respects privacy and anonymity. We will recognize departments that have eliminated harassment and invest in training to create cultural change in places where improvement is still required.
  - d. **Support law enforcement agencies & end the rape kit backlog:** My administration will partner with law enforcement agencies to ensure they have sufficient resources to investigate and prosecute criminal sexual offenses. We will stop repeat offenders by sharing information more effectively across jurisdictions. Further, we will finally end the rape kit backlog by providing local law enforcement and crime labs with additional financial resources, as well as technical support to secure federal funding (Maryland currently has 3,700 untested rape kits and has repeatedly failed to secure federal funding).
2. **Require disclosure to confirm those seeking public employment and state business have not engaged in sexual harassment:** Engaging in sexual harassment or sexual violence should be disqualifying from serving in government or receiving government incentives or contracts. I can affirmatively state that I have never perpetrated sexual harassment or sexual violence of any kind. Just as there are existing financial disclosure requirements, my administration will require every individual seeking public office or funding to disclose whether they have ever committed or endorsed sexual harassment or sexual assault. Disclosure will be required of all individuals seeking public office, including anyone seeking gubernatorial appointments; applicants for jobs in state government; and companies and individuals bidding on state contracts or requesting state incentives or funding.
3. **Address sexual harassment and violence in middle schools and high schools and on college campuses:** The disturbing reality is that college-age women are 3 to 4 times more likely to experience sexual violence, yet too often survivors remain afraid to step forward and action is too rarely taken when they do. On college campuses, we must take steps to prevent sexual violence by proactively addressing the cultural norms of misogyny and objectification, while establishing, communicating, and enforcing clear guidelines on consent and welcomed sexual attention. We must also combat the norms that are shaped and ingrained during middle school and high school through proactive educational efforts, as proposed in HB 1560, to ensure all students understand consent and how to tell whether sexual attention is welcomed.