



**ABUSE OF POWER:  
Uncovering A Decade of  
Sexual Harassment in  
State Government**

**National Women's Defense League**

November 2023

# Acknowledgments

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The National Women's Defense League (NWDL) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and protecting survivors. Our aim is to shine a light on the problem of sexual harassment and its impacts, and to promote solutions. We do research to help understand the breadth of the problem, we provide education for the public and decision makers, and we develop policies and best practices that prevent sexual harassment and protect survivors. The National Women's Defense League is a project of the Center for Transformative Action.

*Cover Photo: Emma Davidson Tribbs*

*Layout: Sara Deneweth*

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# Executive Summary

**This report finds that there have been at least 359 incidents of sexual harassment committed by sitting lawmakers since 2013. Our research has identified 130 state lawmakers who have been publicly accused of sexual harassment in that timeframe.**

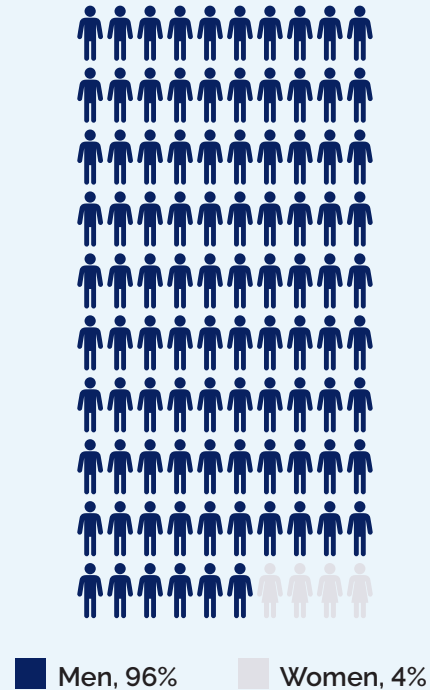
This report is an analysis of sexual harassment by state legislators from 2013 to the present. Relying primarily on media reports and to a limited extent other publicly available records, it documents a consistent pattern of sexual harassment in statehouses across the country.

Pieced together without the benefit of consistent or existing reporting requirements across states or national tracking infrastructure, this report provides a glimpse of the true magnitude of the problem: Lawmakers continue to perpetuate sexual harassment throughout state governments. No state has created a holistic, equitable and effective system that meaningfully prevents abuse from happening, protects and supports survivors of abuse, rectifies the offenders' behavior expediently, or holds violators accountable consistently. This is despite the efforts of several states that have sought to create new policies and procedures since the #MeToo revelations in 2017.

This report considered media reports and publicly available documents of sexual harassment cases where the accused was an elected member of the state legislature or a Governor since 2013. This ongoing research is of vital importance to showcase the patterns of abuse occurring in our state governments. Overall, our research validates what too many working in the political arena already know to be true: the problem of sexual harassment by lawmakers has been overlooked for far too long. As this report specifically explicates, it is an ongoing and under-addressed problem in state legislatures.

Sexual harassment is a problem that continues to put hundreds of people's safety, professions, and well being in jeopardy. In a cultural moment of reconciling the power dynamics in workplaces across the country, and despite an uptick in public reports and media coverage of unchecked harassment by lawmakers in recent years, little research has been done to identify the magnitude and scope of sexual harassment in political and government workplaces.

## ACCUSED LAWMAKERS BY GENDER



The National Women's Defense League was founded, in part, to meet this moment and take it further, by raising awareness of the systemic problem of sexual harassment so it can be addressed. We begin by focusing on arguably one of the most impactful workplaces in the political ecosystem: statehouses. We are starting the conversation with this research, which serves as one the most thorough reports on the prevalence of the problem of sexual harassment in statehouses yet to date.

This report ultimately concludes what has already been true for far too many for too long: Sexual harassment in state politics is not a case of a few bad actors committing one-time transgressions but rather a systemic, ongoing, self-reinforcing failure of laws and policies to set workplace standards, protect employees and hold perpetrators accountable. As we show in this report, there is a well-documented track record of sexual harassment in politics, even if this record feels disjointed and inconsistent due to a lack of structural oversight, public transparency, and advocacy infrastructure.

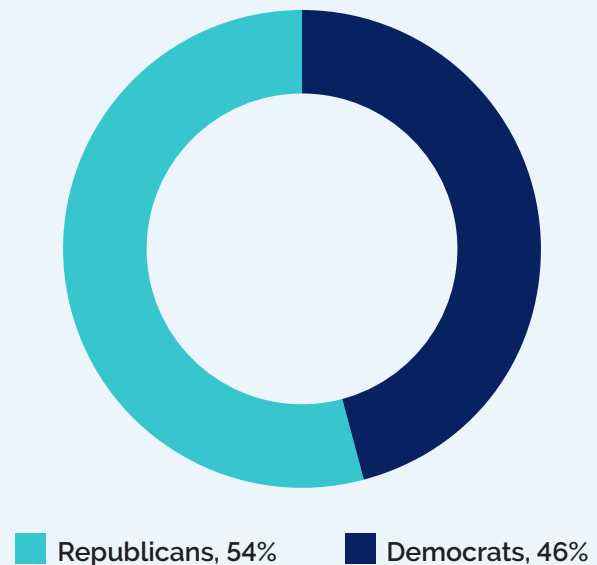
**Overall, our research validates what too many working in the political arena already know to be true: the problem of sexual harassment by lawmakers has been overlooked for far too long.**

Too often, cases of sexual harassment in politics are weaponized to win short-term political points at the expense of survivors. Accusations quickly become co-opted by others as a partisan tool. This reaction and the attention it garners masks the systems that enable harassment and inhibits actual accountability within party ranks. Little is done to protect survivors and future workers, and once this cynical gamesmanship is completed, the legislative world moves on to the next scandal.

We hope the foundational findings in this report serve as a catalyst for policy development and change to address this endemic abuse of power. The National Women's Defense League would hold the following to be true and offer this in the spirit of transparency about our ultimate aims: State lawmakers and statehouses have a unique responsibility to prevent and address sexual harassment within their own ranks if they are ever going to effectively advance policy solutions for all workplaces. All workers deserve a workplace that is free from harassment and one that has adequate avenues to address it when it does occur. Addressing sexual harassment in state politics will have a powerful ripple effect, removing inequitable barriers that women and minorities currently face when seeking to advance their careers in government, and to paving the way for better statewide policies from which all workers can benefit.

Finally, we recognize that the resurfacing of traumatic events for survivors and their allies can be profoundly difficult—for those whose perpetrators are named in this report and for those who have not felt safe to come forward to name others. We do so with the utmost respect for the challenges they've experienced and the lasting impacts they carry. We do not name any survivors in this report beyond some of the state lawmakers who have publicly come forward as survivors themselves.

#### SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS COMMITTED BY MEMBERS OF BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES



#### AT LEAST 359 INCIDENTS

This report finds that there have been *at least* 359 incidents of sexual harassment committed by a sitting lawmaker since 2013. For the purposes of this report, "incident" could include multiple occurrences of harassment over a period of time to the same individual. Our research has identified 130 state lawmakers who have been publicly accused of sexual harassment in that timeframe.

This research likely represents only a fraction of the sexual harassment committed by state officials. Preexisting research has shown that approximately 85% of people who experience sexual harassment never file a formal legal charge; approximately 70%

**This report includes specific descriptions of harassment and assault that could be triggering.**

## Too often, cases of sexual harassment in politics are weaponized to win short-term political points at the expense of survivors.

of employees never even complain internally.<sup>1</sup> If that's the case, our research likely reveals less than one-third of all actual instances of sexual harassment.

While this report tracks 130 separate state elected officials who have been accused of sexual harassment, and the 359 public reports from survivors, each story represents a likely larger group of individuals who were on the receiving end of this abuse and violence.

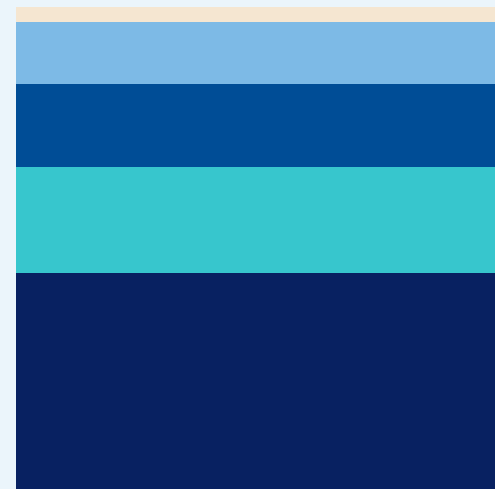
This report finds several key overarching themes that remain consistent over the past decade.

- First, the political community operating within any given statehouse knows about ongoing harassment and who the perpetrators are.
- Second, sexual harassment is not a partisan issue, though both parties attempt to leverage it as such—members of both political parties commit sexual harassment at a nearly equal level.
- Third, this report finds that 96% of publicly accused sexual harassers are male lawmakers. While this report documents the public findings of female lawmakers who have been accused as well, the vast majority of the accused are male.
- Finally, this report highlights several public examples of sexual harassment that have come to light since January 2023, illustrating that sexual harassment is not a problem of the past, but one that continues to impact workers in our state governments today.

### NO ONE IS SAFE

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, state governments employ 4.6 million people.<sup>2</sup> Working inside of a statehouse—as an intern, staffer, lobbyist or lawmaker—is a unique experience. These jobs support and execute the functions of policy making and governance in workspaces led by elected officials. Many of these positions often require an incredible amount of discretion, responsibility, multitasking, and isolation from family and support systems for months on end. The hours are often long and inconsistent, with hearings and meetings lasting well into the night. While public records of misconduct rarely

### SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY JOB TYPE



- Statehouse Employees, 45%
- Other, 22%
- Lobbyists, 17%
- Lawmakers, 13%
- Journalists, 3%

specify job titles, we are able to break down the general professional roles of survivors targeted by harassers in statehouses.

This report finds that lawmakers accused of sexual harassment predominately target legislative staffers (45%). These include individuals working in their official legislative office, committee staff, interns, or pages. Which staffers are considered full time employees varies state by state, but for the purposes of this study, we have included them in a single category.

This report finds that female lobbyists are also vulnerable to sexual harassment and are targeted in 17% of the cases identified. Included in this category are

## This research likely represents only a fraction of the sexual harassment committed by state officials.

people who have been identified by a public report as a lobbyist, meaning that they are being compensated for engaging in supporting or defending against legislation.

Lawmakers themselves are also survivors of sexual harassment by their colleagues, with our research showing that 13% of the incidents identified included a survivor who was a sitting lawmaker.

Our research also shows that 3% of the public incidents included harassment against journalists.

The final group of survivors included are those whose roles are not specifically identified and those who fall into other political categories, such as donors, unregistered advocates and political party staffers. Overall, it is hard to find a group of people working within a statehouse that have not been on the receiving end of lawmaker harassment in the past decade.

### LIMITED ACCOUNTABILITY FOR LEGISLATORS

While this report does not include an evaluation of current regulations or statutes, our research did allow for a summary of the outcomes as reported largely by the media. Survivors, voters, lawmakers, and ultimately state governments are limited in their ability to hold lawmakers accountable for sexual harassment infractions and inappropriate behavior. Lawmaker accountability is found via three primary avenues:

- lawmakers hold themselves publicly accountable;
- their colleagues in the legislature enforce disciplinary measures; or
- accountability is left up to the voters at the ballot box.

In addition to these three outcomes, and in the most egregious cases, law enforcement may step in to take additional legal or disciplinary action.

Our research indicates that nearly 60% of lawmakers attempt to remain in office immediately after an accusation of sexual harassment. If desired, elected officials have several options on how to hold themselves publicly accountable. Less than half of those accused (43%) resign their offices due to harassment accusations. 12% of lawmakers identified chose not to seek reelection at the end of their term and therefore retire.

The data shows that while their colleagues in the legislature have the power to hold the accused accountable, they can be reluctant to step in. In 55% of the incidents identified, no official action was taken against the accused elected official, while 32% of the individual lawmakers identified in this study were censured in some form, meaning they were required to participate in a training, were removed from committees, or lost a leadership position. Legislators can also work to exculpate their colleagues, which data shows happened in 9% of incidents identified. Finally, legislatures can vote to expel a fellow member from their chamber, which happened in 4% of sexual harassment cases.

A third level of accountability lies with the lawmaker's employers: the voters. While 12% of the accused lawmakers identified remove themselves from this option by choosing not to seek reelection, only 12% of lawmakers publicly accused of sexual harassment lost their next election, and 13% of the elected officials identified are still serving in state legislatures today.

A final level of accountability that we consider is the 5% of elected officials who were charged by law enforcement, found guilty, and served jail time over sexual harassment or abuse allegations.

### ABOUT NATIONAL WOMEN'S DEFENSE LEAGUE

The National Women's Defense League (NWDL) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and protecting survivors. Our aim is to shine a light on the problem of sexual harassment and its impacts, and to promote solutions. We do research to help understand the breadth of the problem, we provide education for the public and decision makers, and we develop policies and best practices that prevent sexual harassment and protect survivors. [The National Women's Defense League is a project of the Center for Transformative Action.](#)

# The Scope of the Problem

## AT LEAST 359 INCIDENTS SINCE 2013

At least 130 state lawmakers have been publicly accused of sexual harassment since 2013. Those 130 lawmakers have been publicly accused of harassment by at least 359 individuals. We know that these 359 accusers are only a small portion of those who experience sexual harassment. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission finds that 85% of people who experience sexual harassment never file a formal legal charge, and approximately 70% of employees never even complain internally.<sup>3</sup> Our findings likely represent a fraction of the true scale of the issue.

The 130 lawmakers included in this report represent 45 states. Several states (Delaware, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, and New Jersey) have not identified specific sexual harassment incidents by particular lawmakers during this timeframe, but news reports indicate that sexual harassment remains an issue in those legislatures.



"In **Delaware**, no legislator has been formally accused of sexual misconduct in the past decade. But that might be because the Legislature's written sexual harassment policy applies only to staff—not lawmakers."<sup>4</sup> Delaware House Speaker Pete Schwartzkopf (D) said in 2018, "it would be really stupid or naive to think things don't happen. But we can put things in place to stop it when it does come to our attention."<sup>5</sup>



In 2017, a former **Kansas** House Minority Leader's Chief of Staff alerted her boss to several incidents of harassment. "My intention is to call awareness to the fact that this problem exists and that the majority of women working in the Statehouse have had similar if not worse experiences than I have," the staffer said in an interview. "There needs to be a method to hold legislators accountable for their behavior outside of the ballot box." She declined to name the legislators.<sup>6</sup>



**Louisiana** State Representative Helena Moreno was so tired of "misogynistic jokes told by legislators at the State Capitol" that she started a social media campaign called #ItsNoJoke in 2016.<sup>7</sup>



In 2018, several "female lobbyists and lawmakers came forward to publicly share their stories of sexual harassment at the **Maine** Statehouse. Several testified in support of a bill that would mandate stricter anti-harassment training and education for lawmakers and their staffs and, for the first time, require the same training for lobbyists."<sup>8</sup>



In **New Jersey** in 2019, "20 female campaign staffers, lobbyists, political operatives and lawmakers shared stories of being groped, sexually propositioned, harassed or marginalized while trying to build careers in state and local politics. They painted a portrait of a casually misogynistic system of politics and government where it is nearly impossible for women to remain in the business without having to navigate everything from sexist insults to assaults on their bodies."<sup>9</sup>



## THE STATEHOUSE COMMUNITY KNEW

In most cases, the inappropriate habits of lawmakers are not secret—they are well known within the statehouse community. Rumors and hearsay spread quickly, and it is rarely a shock when an allegation is made public. In their book *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement*, *New York Times* journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey document how female colleagues at Miramax would warn each other about Harvey Weinstein, and would give each other advice on how to ward off his advances, including “sit in armchairs, not sofas, in his presence, so he couldn't sidle up easily, and to wear her winter parka for protection.”<sup>10</sup> Female lobbyists, activists and staffers inside state capitals have the same conversations.



In January 2023, a lobbyist accused a sitting **Pennsylvania** state representative of sexually harassing her, but did not name the elected official.<sup>11</sup> For nearly two months, media outlets “received at least a dozen tips, many unsolicited, from bipartisan sources, of the identity of the representative” and while it was not officially confirmed, “the number and quality of sources willing to identify the same individual—albeit off the record—easily demonstrates the identity of the alleged groper is well known in the State Capitol.”<sup>12</sup> On March 2, the lobbyist stated that State Representative Mike Zabel (D) had harassed her, confirming the various reports and tips.<sup>13</sup>

According to the data collected, each lawmaker identified had an average of 2 public accusers (although some had more than 20). Meaningful complaints were made by several survivors about an individual lawmaker, only to have those allegations not given credence or not seen as a serious violation. These survivors were warning the public about the potential danger public employees face, and the seriousness of harassment claims.



In 2009, then-legislative staffer Raul Bocanegra was disciplined for sexual misconduct after groping a fellow staffer.<sup>14</sup> In November 2017, six women accused then-**California** State Representative Bocanegra (D) of making unwanted sexual advances or comments towards them.<sup>15</sup> Bocanegra resigned his seat on November 27, 2017.<sup>16</sup> In 2018 a legislative investigation substantiated the accusers' claims.<sup>17</sup>



On January 10, 2017, the **Oklahoma** House's Special Investigation Committee announced they were investigating then-State Representative Will Fourkiller (D) for sexual harassment of a female page.<sup>18</sup> Other lawmakers were not surprised, commenting that, “Fourkiller has been known for that kind of behavior in the past. It's pretty widely known.”<sup>19</sup> Fourkiller was advised “to get sensitivity training and blocked from interacting with the Legislature's page program for a year.”<sup>20</sup> He remained in the Legislature but did not seek reelection.

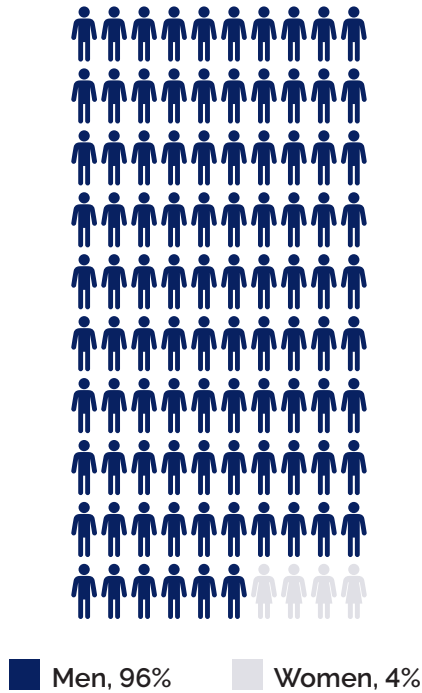


In December 2017, reports emerged that **Pennsylvania** House Democrats spent \$248,000 of taxpayer funds to quietly settle a sexual harassment complaint against State Representative Tom Caltagirone (D).<sup>21</sup> The funds settled a 2015 complaint by a legislative staffer and “involved verbal and physical harassment over a period of years while she worked in his district office in Reading, starting in 2004.”<sup>22</sup>

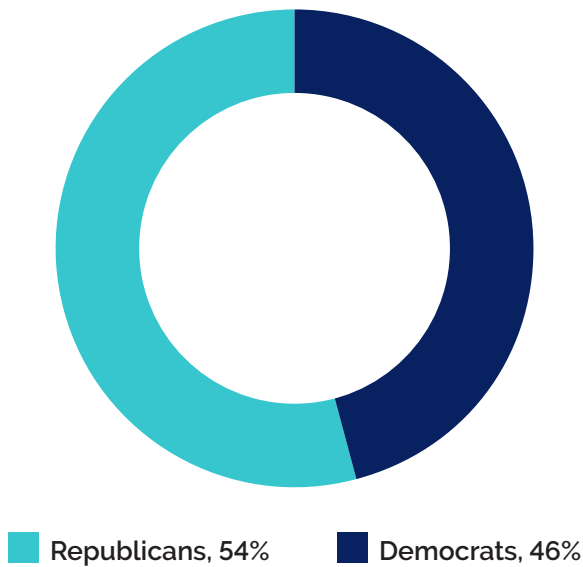


On April 20, 2023, **Tennessee** State Representative Scotty Campbell resigned after news outlets revealed Campbell had inappropriate conduct with a female intern, and the state spent thousands of dollars relocating her, shipping her furniture home, and placing her in a hotel for the remainder of her internship.<sup>23</sup> The initial report, released on March 29 by the Tennessee House Workplace Discrimination & Harassment Subcommittee and sent to the Speaker of the House, was kept secret for more than a month, and possibly would have remained so, but for local journalists.<sup>24</sup>

## ACCUSED LAWMAKERS BY GENDER



## SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS COMMITTED BY MEMBERS OF BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES



When survivors come forward and report their experiences, their reports should be taken seriously and not overlooked.

## BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES ARE CULPABLE

Sexual harassment is committed by members of both political parties equally. Of the 130 lawmakers identified, 46% were Democrats and 54% were Republicans. These 130 lawmakers include four Governors, 41 members of the Upper Chamber (State Senate), and 86 members of the Lower Chamber (House of Delegates, General Assembly, House of Representatives, State Assembly) regardless of which party is in majority control or power. This research considers only sitting members of the legislature and Governors. It does not include candidates for those offices.

This nearly equal representation of improper behavior may surprise some. Democrats may be under the impression that their party would have fewer incidents. According to a 2021 study, "party differences are found when looking at the core issues of societal sexual harassment." Democrats are roughly two times more likely than Republicans to consider 'men getting away with sexual harassment or assault' and 'women not being believed' as a major problem for workplace harassment and assault.<sup>25</sup> Politics escalates these workplace issues into a larger political battle, one in which the fight for a majority can mean stark differences in policies for a range of issues. Sexual harassment in a political world comes with political implications. "Politicians largely operate in a two-party, zero-sum environment. There's a strong incentive to close ranks when the stakes are so high."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, while there is a nearly even split between the parties, sexual harassment transcends party lines, and how a voter responds to these incidents may vary by party. Recent studies find that party affiliation more than gender impacts how a voter will react to accusations of sexual harassment by an elected official.<sup>27</sup> "Shared party identification can be a stronger factor in voter choice than an allegation of sexual assault and sexual harassment and will also reduce the impact of such allegation. Research has shown that, above any other factor, a shared party identification is the strongest factor in voter choice."<sup>28</sup>

There has been a perception that sexual harassment is tolerated more amongst conservatives. Most recently, the public allegations of sexual harassment and assault by Republican President Donald Trump and his Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh were amongst the highest profile sexual harassment incidents in recent years.<sup>29, 30</sup> The outrage provoked

**"The rules of being an ambitious woman in conservative circles rest on several unpleasant axioms. First: many men need rules, either dictated by society, religion, or ethics, to constrain them from behaving rudely sexist at best to monstrously piggish at worst—but they can't or won't always follow them.**

**Second: it falls on the woman to enforce these rules, predicting male misbehavior to ensure she does not become prey.**

**Third—and this is the point at which conservatives truly break from their liberal sisters: the best way to address misogyny is to ignore it. Victimhood, according to this logic, is a liberal complex, and rising above it means rejecting such nonsense."**

**- Tina Nguyen<sup>31</sup>**

by those incidents—on the part of Democrats who could not understand how these allegations were not disqualifying, and by corollary on behalf of Republicans who saw the allegations as underhanded personal political attacks on otherwise qualified candidates— further entrenched the partisanship surrounding sexual harassment.

Recent studies show that both "Democrats and Republicans penalize candidates accused of sexual assault and sexual harassment...When voters are faced with the choice of penalizing their candidate for allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment, they find internal ways to justifying not doing it by separating the morality of such accusations with the professional profile of the candidate."<sup>32</sup>

Our data shows that sexual harassment by elected officials is a pox on both party's houses. Transcending the bounds of simple partisanship, the self-policing of state lawmakers is failing to identify issues early. Lawmakers, it seems, are unable, or cannot be trusted, to hold their peers accountable.

## **MALE LAWMAKERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Men make up 96% of publicly accused sexual harassers in state governments. 125 individuals of the 130 lawmakers identified are men. "This is not a partisan issue. It is a societal problem that manifests itself in a very unique way in an industry that has for decades and decades been male-dominated," said a California political consultant.<sup>33</sup>

Although only 68% of legislators are male, 96% of accused harassers are male, making it a disproportionately male problem. A former state house intern in Kansas described a pervasive "'good ol' boy' environment in the statehouse. It's a regular occurrence, hearing comments. It's like, 'Oh my gosh, why would you say that? It's super inappropriate and you'd never say that to a male intern.' (The statehouse) can be a very sexually objectifying environment."<sup>34</sup>

While the perpetrators of sexual harassment are far more likely to be male, harassment by female elected officials also occurs—5 of the 130 lawmakers identified were women, making them 4% of the overall perpetrators. Given the paucity of female examples, we can easily describe these five specific reports.



**New Mexico** Governor Michele Lujan Grisham (D) settled a sexual harassment suit brought by a former campaign staffer who claimed Lujan Grisham poured a bottle of water on his crotch and then slapped and grabbed his crotch through his pants while laughing.<sup>35</sup>



**California** Assemblywoman Autumn Burke (D) was accused by a staffer of discussing anal sex with staff in 2016.<sup>35,36</sup>



**California** Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia (D) accused by a former staffer of approaching “him alone after an assembly softball game in 2014, squeezed his buttocks and tried to touch his crotch” and a lobbyist claimed Garcia “had been increasingly “flirtatious” and had called him on a few occasions before for late night drinks which he repeatedly declined.”<sup>37</sup>



**Idaho** State Representative Priscilla Giddings (R) posted the name, photo and disparaging remarks about the previously anonymous sexual harassment accuser of fellow Representative Aaron von Ehlinger.<sup>38</sup>



**Wyoming** State Senator Lynn Hutchins (R) compared homosexuality to pedophilia and bestiality, while in conversation with four young LGBTQ constituents about a house bill that would have protected LGBTQ individuals from job and hiring discrimination.<sup>39</sup>

Increasing female leadership has a dramatic impact on curbing sexual harassment. A 2017 survey from the Pew Research Center “found that more women had experienced sexual harassment in male-dominated industries compared to female-dominated industries—at a difference of 28 percent versus 20 percent.”<sup>40,41</sup> A 2019 study from Yale University found that “the best way to prevent sexual and gender-based harassment as well as to improve organization culture is by increasing diversity and women in leadership.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, a survey in the *Harvard Business Review* found that the most effective way to reduce workplace sexual harassment is “hire and promote more women.”<sup>43</sup>

There have been strides in recent years to elect more women to office at every level of government. Women lawmakers currently make up 32% of state legislators nationwide according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, “the highest we’ve seen in our nation’s history.”<sup>44</sup> One former state house employee has seen a difference since more women have been elected. “There definitely were times when the Legislature was more hostile toward female interns. Two years ago was a lot rougher, when there were not as many female legislators. It felt way different, not as welcoming. We need even more women in the Legislature. The environment would drastically improve with more women elected, and the female interns really look up to them.”<sup>45</sup>

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT CONTINUES TO IMPACT OUR LEGISLATURES TODAY

In 2023, we have already seen three state representatives resign or be expelled from office due to their sexual misconduct. In at least one of these cases, the balance of power in the state government was thrown into question until a special election could be held.



Former **Tennessee** State Representative Scotty Campbell (R) was found to have violated the sexual harassment policy after inappropriate conduct with a female intern, which included lewd comments and inappropriate sexual advances.<sup>46</sup> Campbell, who was serving as Vice Chair of the Republican Caucus at the time, claimed “I had consensual adult conversations with two adults off property. I did not know that a workplace policy can be enforced when you’re not at work.”<sup>47</sup> Six hours after the Ethics Committee report was revealed, Campbell resigned.<sup>48</sup>



Former **Texas** state Representative Bryan Slaton (R) was expelled by a unanimous vote of the Texas House on May 9th.<sup>49</sup> Days earlier, the Texas House Committee on General Investigating released a report showing that Slaton had “invited [a] teenage legislative aide to his apartment on March 31, supplied her with rum and cokes to the point she felt “really dizzy” and had “split vision” and then had sexual intercourse with the young woman early the next morning.” Slaton later showed the young staffer a threatening email he told her he received and said everyone involved had to stay quiet.”<sup>50</sup> Additional complaints from three other women, all employees of the Texas Legislature, shortly became public. A special election has been set for November 7, 2023.<sup>51</sup>



Former **Pennsylvania** State Representative Mike Zabel (D) was accused by four women of sexual harassment, including two staffers, a lobbyist and a fellow Representative. He resigned on March 16, 2023.<sup>52</sup> Upon his resignation, the House majority was thrown into question, with the deciding seat up for a special election.<sup>53</sup> On May 16, Heather Boyd won a special election and maintained the Democratic majority.<sup>54</sup>

Three additional sexual harassment cases have been made public during the 2023 legislative session. From a lawmaker asking inappropriate questions during a public committee hearing, to multiple statewide officials disclosing relationships with subordinates, workplace harassment continues to impact our state governments today.



**Arkansas** State Senator Matt McKee (R) asked a constituent about their genitalia during a public hearing.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Gwendolyn Herzig, a pharmacist who self-identifies as a transgender woman, was testifying against a bill that would prohibit physicians from performing transgender surgeries or prescribing puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones to minors. The bill would also allow people who have received such medical care to sue medical practitioners for up to 30 years after turning 18.<sup>56</sup> “You said that you’re a trans woman?” McKee asked Herzig. “Do you have a penis?”<sup>57</sup> Dr. Herzig replied, “I don’t know what my rights are, but that question was highly inappropriate, I’m a healthcare professional, a doctor. Please treat me as such.”<sup>58</sup> McKee received no punishment. The bill passed the committee, and ultimately became law on March 8, 2023.



**North Carolina** Speaker of the House Tim Moore (R) was sued by Scott Lassiter, who accused Moore of having a sexual relationship with his wife, Jamie Liles Lassiter.<sup>59</sup> According to the lawsuit, Mr. Lassiter alleges Moore’s conduct “revealed a perverse form of symbiosis in which he persuaded her to engage in degrading acts to satisfy his desires, recognizing that Mrs. Lassiter hoped her acquiescence to his demands would result in Defendant Tim Moore supporting favorable action for the organization she represents.”<sup>60</sup> On July 3, 2023, Lassiter dropped his lawsuit, saying that the matter “had been resolved.”<sup>61</sup>



**Florida** State Representative Fabian Basabe (R) was accused by two former staffers of battery and defamation following what they describe as a pattern of sexual harassment and unwanted touching.<sup>62</sup> According to the lawsuit, “Basabe repeatedly talked about sex with them and showed them a photo of a naked man on his phone,” “advised [the staffer] to break off his engagement with his girlfriend and explore sex with men” and that he “groped and tried to kiss [the staffer] after a night of drinking.”<sup>63</sup> As of this report, the suit is awaiting a trial.

*Conclusion: Sexual harassment by state elected officials is continuing to have an impact on legislatures. Sexual harassment in America’s statehouses poses a systemic danger. The frequency and consistency of harassment supersedes party and state, making it a national issue.*

# No One is Safe

**"I stood there in stunned silence, shocked and humiliated. But, of course, that was the point. I never thought the governor wanted to have sex with me. It wasn't about sex. It was about power. He wanted me to know that I was powerless."**

**- New York Statehouse Reporter<sup>64</sup>**

Harassment of any kind in a workplace is abhorrent, but when our elected representatives are sexually harassing and threatening staff, fellow lawmakers, advocates and others, then the very foundation of democracy is corrupt. The power dynamic between an elected official and a constituent, staffer or advocate is undeniable; the elected leader has the final say and vote, and therefore holds all the power. In government relations, power dynamics are currency and oversight is limited. According to comments made to the *New York Times* in 2017, "long working days flow into alcohol-fueled socializing with male lawmakers, often bunked in hotels in isolated small towns for the few months of a state legislative session. Seasoned lobbyists said that smoothly deflecting a lawmaker's physical advance was a job skill as essential as winning support for a bill."<sup>65</sup>

The systems that we use to govern our states and communities remain "old boys' clubs" that have not updated their processes to ensure that governments are fully inclusive and protective. There is no national, overarching governing body requiring transparency, much less providing oversight, for state legislatures. This allows each state to continue to silence accusers and permit harassers to continue these predations on new survivors.

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT BY JOB TYPE



Statehouse Employees, 45%

Other, 22%

Lobbyists, 17%

Lawmakers, 13%

Journalists, 3%



**Idaho** State Representative Priscillia Giddings (R), publicly identified and disparaged the teenage accuser of former Idaho State Representative Aaron von Ehlinger (R),<sup>66</sup>



**New York** Assemblyman Steve McLaughline (R) asked a female staffer for a nude photo and publicly released her name.<sup>67</sup>



**Kentucky** State Representatives Jeffry Hoover (R), Michael Meredith (R), and Jim DeCesare (D) sued a staff member for \$110,000 after going public with her sexual harassment allegation.<sup>68</sup>

After coming forward with their story, most survivors are left unprotected, and receive personal hate messages at their homes, on their phones and on social media. In many cases, they risk their reputation, privacy and livelihoods. Many do not come forward because of the backlash they know that they will receive. An expose from *The 19th* notes that “dealing with alleged harassment in statehouses remains a maze of bureaucratic red tape that, despite efforts to improve processes, has left people in uncomfortable power dynamics or complete inaction after alleged sexual harassment or bullying.”<sup>69</sup> Working inside of a statehouse—as an intern, staffer, lobbyist or lawmaker—may be a unique experience, but a worker is still a worker, regardless of their profession. More must be done within statehouses across the country to ensure that there is a well-supported system that encourages early reporting and accountability for all instances of harassment, including minor infractions. “People wouldn’t want to deal with someone who complains about something that happens all the time,” said a New Jersey lobbyist. “Once you complain . . . you’re the ‘difficult woman.’”<sup>70</sup>

Survivors of lawmaker harassment hold a variety of positions within a statehouse.

- 45% of the sexual harassment cases identified a statehouse employee as the target of the harassment or abuse. 11% of these staffers have been identified specifically as interns.
- 17% of the lawmakers listed in our study of sexual misconduct targeted lobbyists.
- 13% of the lawmaker misconduct instances were against fellow lawmakers.
- 3% of the lawmakers in our study targeted journalists.

Our research shows that some lawmakers harass women in multiple legislative positions, and these women therefore may fall into multiple categories.

### MOST LAWMAKER HARASSMENT TARGETS LEGISLATIVE STAFFERS

The plurality of lawmakers considered herein (45%) targeted legislative and statehouse staff—state employees who work inside the statehouse in close proximity to elected officials. These staffers occupy numerous positions, including but not limited to legislative aides, committee and topic experts, and administrative support staff. Public reports of these sexual misconduct cases rarely include the specific job title, so we are unable to provide more insight into patterns or data associated with how closely or regularly these individuals worked with their abusers.



Staffers in **New York** Assemblyman Micah Kellner’s (D) office were harassed by the lawmaker via online chats. Kellner told a young female staffer that she had been hired because “you were cute during the interview” and asked if she had a boyfriend because “I guess secretly I didn’t want you to have one. I like being the only man in your life. Don’t cheat on me.”<sup>71</sup> Male staffers experienced similar behavior, with the Assemblyman making comments about the staffer’s “appearance and his sex life all the time.”<sup>72</sup>

**“It was creepy. One time [the lawmaker] leaned onto [a staffer’s] shoulders and told him he had pretty hands—and he just froze. It escalated to the point where he actually got up the nerve to confront [the lawmaker]. And after that, things did not get better. [The lawmaker] took him off projects, diminished his role in the office, and when everyone else got a raise a few weeks later, his salary stayed the same. No one was surprised when [the staffer] quit.”<sup>73</sup>**



Another **New York** Assemblyman, Dennis Gabryszak (D) was accused by seven former staffers for “making repeated sexually charged comments and suggestions to female staffers.”<sup>74</sup> These comments and suggestions included a staffer being taken to Gabryszak’s apartment and being told she could use the rooftop to sunbathe topless, being told daily that an “outfit was hot,” commenting on staffers’ appearance to other lawmakers, asking staffers to join the lawmaker for a massage, and suggesting that for a Christmas photo, female staffers should “dress in sexy elf costumes and that he should be Santa” with staffers posed sitting on the lawmaker’s lap.<sup>75</sup>



**Pennsylvania** State Senator Daylin Leach (D) was accused by 11 former staffers of touching them without consent and making inappropriate sexual comments about them.<sup>76</sup>



**Nebraska** State Senator Mike Groene (R) resigned after a female staffer found photos of herself tagged with sexual and inappropriate captions on the lawmaker’s computer.<sup>77</sup> The staffer noted that the photos were of “provocative body parts” and had been shared with others.<sup>78</sup>

11% of the 130 lawmakers publicly accused of sexual misconduct targeted interns. Statehouse interns are typically college students, who “[provide] assistance, paid or unpaid, to an office on a temporary basis. The internship experience is typically considered to provide an educational benefit for that individual.”<sup>79</sup> It is possible that some “interns” were included in media reports as part of a larger definition of “staff”, but this cannot be confirmed based on publicly available documents.

**“He completely disregarded what I was saying and asked, ‘How hard would you slap me if I tried to kiss you?’ I was just out of high school and he knew that. He’s so gross. He just makes my skin crawl and he made other people feel that way, too. If your comment has anything to do with a woman’s body or clothing or it’s not work-related, you probably shouldn’t say it.”<sup>80</sup> - Former Kansas Statehouse Intern**

In most states, unpaid interns — in legislatures or other workplaces — are not considered to be employees and therefore aren’t protected against workplace sexual harassment under the federal Civil Rights Act.<sup>81</sup> According to a Stateline review of state policies, some legislatures have sexual harassment policies that allow non-employees to file claims to the legislature of sexual harassment against legislative staff and lawmakers. But only a handful of states specifically mention interns, and even when they do, that doesn’t necessarily give them legal standing for filing a civil lawsuit.<sup>82</sup> “It is no surprise that most young women, after being forced to contend with abusive language and misogynistic behavior for a year or two, get out of the business to do something else,” a New Jersey political strategist notes.<sup>83</sup>

Examples abound of lawmakers harassing interns with inappropriate conversation, touching and requests.



Two **Missouri** State Representatives, John Diehl (R) was caught having “exchanges of sexually suggestive text messages between himself and a female House intern,”<sup>84</sup> and DaRon McGee (D), who was found to have “behaved unethically in 2017 and 2018 by sending flirtatious text messages and repeatedly attempting to begin a relationship with a legislative employee whom he supervised” by a Missouri House Ethics Committee.<sup>85</sup>





The **Oklahoma** House of Representatives paid \$44,500 of taxpayer funds to a former legislative assistant after State Representative Dan Kirby (R) repeatedly asked her for nude photographs, and then fired the staffer when she reported the harassment.<sup>86</sup>



**Texas** State Senator Charles Schwertner (R) was investigated by the University of Texas at Austin for sending “sexually explicit material to a graduate student” who had been serving in the Senator’s office as an intern through a program provided by the university.<sup>87</sup>

## FEMALE LOBBYISTS ARE DEFENSELESS

17% of the lawmakers listed in our study of sexual misconduct targeted lobbyists. Lobbyists and activists hold a unique place in a state legislature, and while the government is not their direct employer, their work and livelihoods depend on maintaining good relationships with lawmakers and staff over multiple years. As the #MeToo movement began expanding, female lobbyists added their voices to the growing chorus of those calling for change. They have shared stories about their own harassment experiences.

According to a 2017 report by the *New York Times*, “female lobbyists have emerged as especially vulnerable in legislatures and in Congress because, unlike government employees, they often have no avenue to report complaints and receive due process.”<sup>88</sup> The statehouse is their workplace, although most state house protections do not apply to them or to any “third parties” that frequent capitals and work with elected officials on a regular basis.



A lobbyist in **New Mexico** tells a story about asking a lawmaker for his vote, to which his response was, “You can have my vote if you have sex with me.”<sup>89</sup>



A lobbyist in **Washington** State said, “When I’ve been cornered up against a wall by a senator who is much larger than me, all I’m thinking is, ‘How do I get out of this with a smile on my face and maintain the relationship?’”<sup>90</sup>



**New Mexico** State Representative Carl Trujillo (D) was accused of “propositioning and inappropriately touching” a lobbyist working on animal protection issues. She accused Trujillo of “[holding] your power as a state legislator over my head, making it clear that passion for my cause would get me nowhere unless I demonstrated ‘passion’ for you.”<sup>91</sup>



**West Virginia** State Delegate Austin Haynes (R) was accused of harassment by a lobbyist working on Native American tribal recognition. The lobbyist claimed that she and Haynes began an online conversation about a bill that Haynes would introduce, but that the messages quickly became inappropriate, including questions from Haynes about if the lobbyist had sex toys or masturbated.<sup>92</sup> Other women came forward with similar accusations, that “...his M.O. was to Facebook message them in the middle of the night, being inappropriate, commenting on their appearance, mentioning that he’s a delegate in the House of Delegates, sometimes even asking if he could see them” said an attorney for the women.<sup>93</sup>

While lobbyists are not direct employees of the state government, their safety is potentially put in jeopardy every time they communicate with lawmakers. Because of this bureaucratic remove, they then have few options to address problematic behaviors. “Lobbyists who have been harassed are essentially powerless in their workplaces, all-dependent on access to mostly male lawmakers for meetings and influence to advance legislation and earn their living.”<sup>94</sup>

## LAWMAKERS CAN BE SURVIVORS THEMSELVES

**“Women have spent generations breaking down barriers to hold positions of public trust and confidence, but the disgusting unwanted sexual advances by people like [the Representative] have continuously held women back or slowed the progress they have made. Too often, the behavior of such men and the silent complicity of others has, sadly, prevented others from even believing the truth.”**  
- Pennsylvania Lawmaker Statement<sup>95</sup>

15% of the lawmaker misconduct instances were against fellow lawmakers. These occurrences highlight the most distinct reality: the power dynamics of traditional workplaces prevail in a statehouse as well. Each elected official theoretically comes to the capital imbued with the same powers and authority as any other member. However, the patriarchal habits of a majority white state legislature only further reinforce society's prevailing gender norms, and place women and minority lawmakers at a unique disadvantage. “Any time you have an environment where there's people in a position of power and others who are very enthusiastic about being involved in the industry, whether it's Hollywood or Sacramento, you have a system that's ripe for exploitation,” said Laura Friedman (D), a California Assemblywoman.<sup>96</sup>



**Florida** State Senator Lizbeth Benacquisto (R) asserted that at a public charity event, then-Representative Ritch Workman (R) “...approached me from behind, pushed his body up against me and made vulgar and inappropriate gestures. I immediately asked him to stop. He continued to make vulgar and inappropriate comments and gestures until other attendees intervened. I found his conduct to be abhorrent.”<sup>97</sup>



**Michigan** State Senator Mallory McMorrow (D) describes when Michigan State Senator Peter Lucido (R) “... shook her hand while using his other hand to hold her lower back, with his fingers on her hips, grazing her 'upper rear.' 'At that moment, still holding his hand on my low back, he looked me up and down, raised his eyebrows.'” She said she felt she had been reduced to an object and a “piece of meat.”<sup>98</sup>

According to a 2017 story in *The Hill*, “after being groped in public by a powerful committee chairman, one young state legislator in an eastern state, serving her first term in office, decided to take the political risk of reporting the assault. She learned she would need to report the incident to the ethics committee overseeing her state's legislature. Then she learned the chairman of the ethics committee was the man who assaulted her.”<sup>99</sup>



**Oregon** Senator Sara Gelser (D) spoke of “being touched too long, having a hand on your thigh either above or below your skirt in what someone believes is just a friendly way, a hand around the shoulder where the fingers are going beneath your shirt, having someone pull you in too close, a hand that's lingering on your lower back, or someone talking to you so closely that your ear is wet when you pull away.”<sup>100</sup>

In addition to suffering these predations directly, female lawmakers often bear witness to sexual harassment of colleagues.



**New Mexico** State Representative Kelly Fajardo (R) says she was out with a lobbyist when the lobbyist got a text from another lawmaker. “The text said, 'Hey, let's talk about this bill, my wife's not here, come up to my hotel room.' She didn't know what to do, and I didn't know what to do. It's bothered me ever since.”<sup>101</sup>

Female lawmakers continue to try and pass internal rules and legislation that would help prevent workplace harassment in their state houses, only to find their efforts frustrated in spite of their nominally powerful leadership roles. Former Kansas Senate President Susan Wagle (R) said "the problem we run into with these incidents is, people are unwilling to name the perpetrator. And we really need, when it comes to sexual harassment, for women to name the perpetrator. Because once one person is named, usually a number of people come out with the same complaint. But it takes one brave woman to name someone."<sup>102</sup>

Most lawmakers who have experienced harassment see themselves in a position to make the most change.



**Colorado** State Representative Faith Winter (D) spoke out as one of the nine female staffers and lobbyists who accused Colorado State Representative Steve Lebsack (D) of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment "impacts our aides, our interns and the lobbyists even more than it impacts the lawmakers because they are the most vulnerable. By coming forward, they risk their careers, they risk their clients, they risk their income and now they have a safer place to work, too."<sup>103</sup>



**Oregon** State Senator Sara Gelsler (D) spoke about a larger impact for state employees: "Women deserve to come to work in this Capitol and to be safe, to be respected and to be able to launch their careers without having to sacrifice their dignity to do it."<sup>104</sup>

## HARASSMENT EXTENDS TO JOURNALISTS

**"[The State House] is a boys club where I learned to suck it up when men made comments about my body, hovered too close or even showed up in my office when I stopped responding to calls and texts because they had crossed a line. Women shouldn't have to live and work like that. It's exhausting. It's time for a real reckoning." - New York Statehouse Reporter<sup>105</sup>**

3% of survivors were identified as journalists and members of the media. In our hyper-partisan world, attacks on journalists have increased.<sup>106</sup> In statehouses, local journalists are part of a struggling profession, fighting to keep local and state news relevant and applicable to their reader's daily lives. Access to behind-the-scenes events that lead to legislative action (or inaction) can make or break a reporter's career.



A 22-year old reporter for *Michigan Advance* was waiting to interview then-**Michigan** State Senator Peter Lucido (R). Lucido was greeting a group of high school boys when he turned to the reporter and said "You should hang around! You could have a lot of fun with these boys, or they could have a lot of fun with you." According to the reporter, "the teenagers burst into an Old Boys' Network-type of laughter, and I walked away knowing that I had been the punchline of their "locker room" talk. Except it wasn't the locker room; it was the Senate chamber. And this isn't high school. It's my career."<sup>107</sup>



A former reporter for *Politico New York* publicly accused then- **New York** Governor Andrew Cuomo (D) of sexual harassment in 2021. writing "the Governor took my hand, as if to shake it, then refused to let go. He put his other arm around my back, his hand on my waist, and held me firmly in place while indicating to a photographer he wanted us to pose for a picture. My job was to analyze and scrutinize him. I didn't want a photo of him with his hands on my body and a smile on my face. But I made the reflexive assessment that most women and marginalized people know instinctively, the calculation about risk and power and self-preservation. I knew it would be far easier to smile for the brief moment it takes to snap a picture than to challenge one of the most powerful men in the country."<sup>108</sup>



A former **New York** *Associated Press* correspondent had previously refused a job offer from the Governor's staff. But, she says, months after, Cuomo would call her to answer simple questions that an aide could have handled. He would rarely give her a straight answer, but often asked her personal questions about herself. She could tell the governor was flirting with her, she said, but did her best to do her job without flirting back.<sup>109</sup>

## HARASSMENT REACHES THE ENTIRE POLITICAL WORLD

28% of the incidents recorded were against other players in the political sphere, but were not directly related to the statehouse as a workplace. These include harassment against donors, constituents, and other staffers in workplaces outside of the statehouse that took place while the accused was serving in the legislature. These examples also include reports where the accusers' role was not specified, but the harassment took place while the accused legislator was in office.



**North Carolina** State Representative Duane Hall (D) was accused by five women of sexual harassment, including "persistent sexual innuendo" and kissing them without their consent, and an incident in which Hall was allegedly seen pulling a woman into his lap and kissing her against her will at a political gala.<sup>110</sup>



**Ohio** State Senator Cliff Hite (R) resigned after allegations that Hite "had repeatedly sought sex from a woman, telling her that he was a "grown man with needs."<sup>111</sup>



**Tennessee** State Representative Rick Staples (D) faced disciplinary action after he was accused of inappropriate sexual behavior. His accuser said, "My first day doing anything in politics, one of the very first things I heard was not to be alone in a room with Rick," she said in an interview.<sup>112</sup>

**Conclusion: Sexual harassment by elected officials impacts nearly every type of individual that interacts with state governments.**



**Why Statehouse interns are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment**

## **Los Angeles Times**

Female lawmakers, staffers and lobbyists speak out on 'pervasive' harassment in California's Capitol

**AP**

**Former Idaho Lawmaker Sentenced to 20 Years Prison for Rape**

## **The New York Times**

*For Female Lobbyists, Harassment Often Accompanies Access*

# There is Limited Accountability for Lawmakers

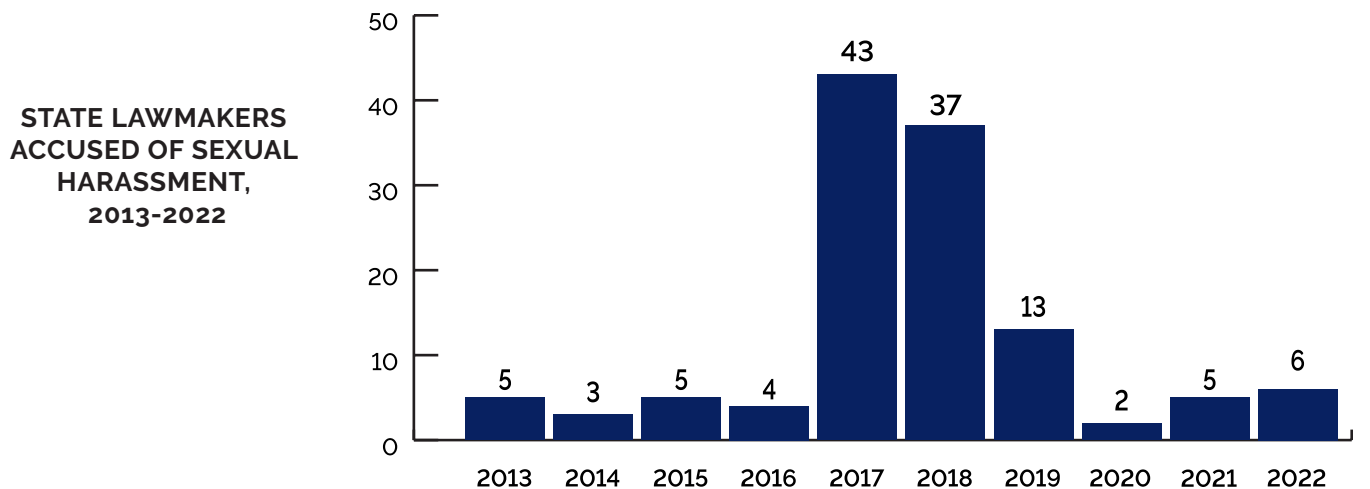
State governments are limited in their options to punish or remove lawmakers who engage in inappropriate behaviors. Because state legislatures are accountable to voters, lawmakers don't always have the same employment relationships with those who report to them as exist in most work environments. Making the dynamic even more complex is the fact that most legislatures do not have a trusted, neutral body that exists to receive any complaints against elected officials. A committee of state legislators beholden to their colleagues is often left to evaluate allegations, a situation compounded by the historical make-up of these chambers, which is predominantly white men.<sup>113</sup>

Currently, lawmakers are responsible for setting their own rules of decorum and behavior, and decide amongst themselves the workplace conditions they wish to operate under. Infractions are dealt with internally and behind closed doors. Rarely does the public hear about any given transgression, or any efforts that were taken to combat or remediate it. Uncovering the truth about our elected officials' behaviors is a cornerstone of good governance. We elect these individuals to represent our voices in making decisions about all aspects of our lives. When our representatives take advantage of their position and power, they betray the public as well as the individual survivors.

The most publicly available method of preventing harassers from holding elected office is to deny them election or reelection. But this is an indirect and unreliable pathway—especially if states are using elections as a replacement for a human resource department. According to our findings, only 12% of publicly accused lawmakers lost reelection after public allegations of sexual harassment. In several examples, a candidate is elected in spite of widespread public awareness of allegations against them. Sexual harassment and abuse allegations are not reliable disqualifying factors for voters.

The #MeToo Movement proved to be a short-lived exception. The greatest number and swiftest removals of lawmakers occurred in late 2017 and throughout 2018 at the height of #MeToo. Polls taken at the time showed 81% of voters saw sexual harassment in the workplace as a serious problem and 87% of voters agreed that it needed to be easier for women to safely report sexual harassment in the workplace.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, and probably even more importantly, 52% of voters agreed that they would never vote for a person accused of sexual harassment, making it tougher for incumbent lawmakers with harassment allegations to win reelection.<sup>115</sup>

However, as coverage of the #MeToo movement waned, fewer state legislatures prioritized workplace harassment law changes, and fewer cases of sexual harassment in statehouses were brought to light. Our data shows that in the 4 years leading up to #MeToo (2013-2016), 17 lawmakers were publicly accused of sexual harassment. In 2017 that number jumped to 43 lawmakers, and then dropped in 2018 with 37 state lawmakers



accused of sexual harassment that year. This frequency then decreased sharply in 2019, when 13 lawmakers were publicly accused nationwide, and continued to decline in the following years (2020 = 2 lawmakers; 2021 = 5 lawmakers; 2022 = 6 lawmakers). This roughly correlates to a decrease in the number of media articles, academic studies and public polls released surrounding #MeToo issues in these same time periods.

### THE MAJORITY OF ACCUSED LAWMAKERS REMAIN IN OFFICE

After an accusation, the majority of lawmakers (59%) attempt to remain in office. Less than half (43%) resign after they are accused of sexual harassment. How quickly these resignations take place varies widely.



Some lawmakers resign quickly, like **Illinois** State Representative Nick Sauer (R) who resigned a few hours after being accused of using nude photographs of an ex-girlfriend to create an Instagram account where he portrayed himself to be a woman looking for online relationships with men.<sup>116</sup>



Others push back against the allegations for months while investigations take place. **New York** Governor Andrew Cuomo (D) resigned 8 months after being accused of sexually harassing 11 women.<sup>117</sup>



**Oregon** State Representatives Diego Hernandez (D) resigned after a nine month investigation into 7 women's accusations of sexual harassment, and just before his colleagues took up a vote of expulsion against him.<sup>117,118</sup>

There are also examples where lawmakers resign prior to any allegations becoming public.



**Mississippi** State Representative John Moore (R) resigned from the House on December 8, 2017 citing health reasons.<sup>119</sup> The following Monday, reports broke that Moore "was facing sexual harassment complaints from multiple women."<sup>120</sup> Reports also stated that although the Legislature was preparing an investigation into the accusations at the time of his resignation, Moore's resignation ended the House's inquiry.<sup>121</sup>

While most accused lawmakers choose to remain in office after an allegation, 12% of them retire after their term and choose not to seek reelection. The allegations against them usually do not follow them once they have left the statehouse, allowing these former officials to seek out other professions, or in some cases, to run for and serve in different offices. Several have returned to the state capital as lobbyists.



Former **New York** State Senator Jeffrey Klein returned to Albany as a lobbyist after resigning over an accusation of forcibly kissing a female staffer.<sup>122</sup>



Former **Illinois** State Representative Lou Lang (D) received an offer from a Springfield lobbying firm while he was being investigated for a sexual harassment accusation.<sup>123</sup>

Several formerly accused officials have moved to local government.



After completing 3 terms in the State House and one in the State Senate, a political career spanning 5 years and 4 sexual harassment accusations, former **Michigan** State Senator Peter Lucido (R) was elected to the office of Macomb County Prosecutor, and is the first Republican to hold the office since 1944.<sup>124</sup>



Former **California** State Senator Joel Anderson (R) was accused of physically and verbally harassing a lobbyist at a fundraising event.<sup>125</sup> After deciding not to seek reelection, Anderson was elected to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors where he currently serves.<sup>126</sup>



Former **Colorado** State Representative Paul Rosenthal (D) failed to qualify for the ballot in his next election after two women filed sexual harassment complaints against him.<sup>127</sup> Rosenthal ran for and currently serves on Denver's Regional Transportation District board of directors.<sup>128</sup>



Former **Missouri** State Representative DaRon McGee (D) resigned from the State House after a Missouri House Ethics Committee investigation declared that McGee had sent text messages to a staffer he supervised that "gave the appearance of ... attempting to establish an amorous relationship."<sup>129</sup> McGee currently serves as the Chairman of the Jackson County Legislature.<sup>130</sup>

Other former lawmakers have made national headlines.



Former **Georgia** State Representative Calvin Smyre (D) faced no consequences after being accused of sexual assault by a Fox News Reporter.<sup>131</sup> Smyre retired from the Georgia Statehouse and has been nominated by President Joe Biden to be the United States ambassador to the Bahamas.<sup>132, 133</sup>



**Georgia** State Senator David Shafer (R) was accused of retaliation against a female lobbyist when she refused his advances. He remained in office, but lost the lieutenant gubernatorial primary in the next election.<sup>134</sup> Shafer was elected Chairman of the Georgia Republican Party and currently serves as Chairman Emeritus.<sup>135</sup> On August 14, 2023, he was indicted along with 18 other people in the prosecution related to the 2020 election in Georgia.<sup>136</sup>

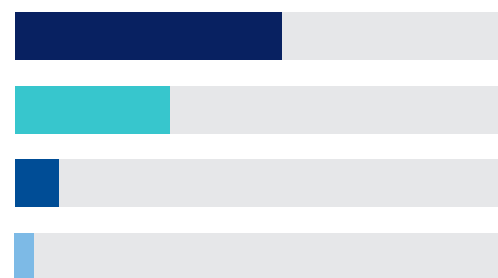
Resigning or choosing not to seek reelection are both choices that the lawmaker makes personally, deciding their elected fate for themselves.

### THE LEGISLATURES' OPTIONS

State Legislatures have several options for how to officially respond to an accusation of a member committing sexual harassment. However, in 55% of the incidents identified, legislatures chose to do nothing, and no official action was taken against the accused lawmaker. There is no way to track internal party or caucus meetings, conversations or decisions, but according to legislative records, there is typically no legislative punishment or consequence for a lawmaker who commits sexual harassment.

If a given legislature takes action to hold one of its members accountable, the most popular option has been to censure the accused lawmaker. 32% of officials identified were censured in some form, either by losing a leadership position, being removed from committees or receiving an official reprimand. Censures usually come early in the process of a sexual harassment investigation, and may be seen as

### ACCUSATION OUTCOME



- No Official Action, 55%
- Censure, 32%
- Exculpate, 9%
- Expel, 4%



a "first step" of accountability. If other factors are in place (having multiple accusers or revelations of additional damning evidence, etc), then the accused's legislative colleagues may take additional action.

These censures can come in the form of something as simple as mandated sexual harassment and sensitivity training.



**Alaska** State Representative Justin Parish (D) was required to attend sexual harassment training after a complaint that Parish had engaged in "unwanted attention, flirting, phone calls and touching on the arms and torso."<sup>137</sup>



**California** State Senator Devon Mathis (D) was required to attend sexual harassment training after an internal investigation confirmed reports of him sexually assaulting a staffer while she was unconscious and allegations of "heavy drinking and overt sexism toward a senior staff member."<sup>138, 139</sup>

More serious consequences include when accused lawmakers are removed from their assigned committees, removing their ability to discuss or vote on policies (other than on final passage). This decreases their influence in the chamber and is seen as a demotion and punishment.



**Washington** State Representative Matt Manweller was removed from all House committees and resigned as assistant floor leader after sexual harassment allegations from a former legislative staffer.<sup>140, 141</sup>



**Utah** State Senator Gene Davis (D) was removed from his committee assignments after a former intern accused Davis of invading her physical boundaries, and an independent investigation found that these accusations "more likely than not" violated the Legislature's harassment policy.<sup>142</sup>



**Pennsylvania** State Representative Nick Miccarelli (R) was removed from all committees and stripped of his security privileges at the capital when two women accused Miccarelli of being sexually and physically abusive. This included when Miccarelli sent "sexually explicit emails and images without a valid purpose" to a woman; when he was driving a woman at a high speed, took out a gun and threatened to kill both himself and her; and when he failed to remove an accuser's name on a social media post, which was seen as retaliation under the House sexual harassment policy.<sup>143</sup>

Sometimes, lawmakers proactively resign from their committees or leadership posts.



**New Mexico** State Senator Daniel Ivey-Soto (D) resigned from his position as the chair of the Senate Rules Committee after an ethics committee had found probable cause that Ivey-Soto had violated the Senate's anti-harassment policy.<sup>144, 145</sup>



**Wisconsin** State Representative Rob Brooks (R) resigned as assistant Assembly majority leader after "making racial and sexual comments to female lawmakers."<sup>146</sup>

State Legislatures also have the power to exculpate their colleagues, which they have done in 9% of the cases in the past decade. These examples usually come after official inquiries and investigations have concluded, providing evidence about the incident and argument for why the elected official should be cleared.



Both **Colorado** State Senators Larry Crowder (R) and Jack Tate (R) were cleared of wrongdoing by Senate President Kevin Grantham (R) despite independent investigations determining the allegations against the Senators credible. Crowder was accused by a fellow legislator of "pinching her buttocks and making an inappropriate sexual comment to her."<sup>147</sup> Tate was alleged to have made inappropriate comments and flirtatiously touched an intern in 2017.<sup>148, 149</sup>



**Illinois** State Senator Ira Silverstein (D) was cleared when inspector general Julie Porter released a report absolving him of sexually harassing a lobbyist, but also wrote, "Silverstein should have been much more cautious and conscientious about engaging in these types of teasing and flirtatious communications with someone he knew was depending on him to advance legislation."<sup>150</sup>

In very rare cases (4%) the legislature has expelled a colleague for sexual harassment, misconduct, or violations of their respective rules of decorum. Of the 130 cases identified in the past 10 years, only 5 elected officials have been expelled over sexual misconduct.



**Tennessee** State Representative Jeremy Durham (R) was expelled by a vote of 70-2-16 during a special session of the General Assembly called by Governor Bill Haslam.<sup>151</sup> The expulsion vote came after an Attorney General's special investigation found that Durham had sexually harassed at least 22 women.<sup>152</sup>



**Colorado** State Representative Steve Lebsock (D) was expelled by a vote of 52-9, just minutes after he changed his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican so that the Republicans could fill his vacancy.<sup>153</sup> An independent investigation had found credible evidence of 11 allegations of sexual harassment from five women.<sup>154, 155</sup>



**Arizona** State Representative Don Shooter (R) was expelled by a vote of 56-3 after being suspended from his Chairmanship of the House Appropriations Committee and having the option to resign.<sup>156, 157</sup> 9 women, including 3 lawmakers, had accused Shooter of making sexually charged comments and engaging in unwanted touching.<sup>158</sup>



**North Dakota** State Representative Luke Simons (R) was expelled by a vote of 69-25 —the first state lawmaker to be expelled in North Dakota's history.<sup>159</sup> The North Dakota's Legislative Council presented 14 pages of complaints against Simons from women alleging inappropriate behavior.<sup>160</sup> These documents included allegations that Simons "had inappropriate interactions with female staffers and interns, commented on their appearances, and attempted to give a staffer an unwanted shoulder massage."<sup>161</sup>



**Texas** State Representative Bryan Slaton (R) was expelled unanimously (147-0) a day after he resigned his seat in the Texas House.<sup>162</sup> The Texas House Committee on General Investigating reported that Slaton had provided alcohol to a 19-year-old intern at his apartment, where she reported she felt "really dizzy" and had "split vision."<sup>163</sup>

## LEAVING IT UP TO THE VOTERS

One way to ensure that a lawmaker is held accountable to constituents for their behavior is to vote them out. As mentioned earlier, 12% of accused lawmakers decided against letting their voters decide their fate, and chose not to run in the next election.

But voters do not see sexual harassment or misconduct as disqualifying behavior. Only 12% of accused lawmakers lost reelection in the election directly following the allegations against them. A 2022 study found that “because partisanship provides an identity justification to vote for a particular candidate, voters with strong partisanship will be less likely to remove support of their own party’s candidate due to allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment.”<sup>164</sup>

Similarly, a 2021 study noted that “sexual harassment is an abuse of power—especially when it involves a person in a leadership position such as a political candidate or elected official—and so represents a behavior that we would expect to dampen voter support,” but that “while sexual harassment holds negative valence, election outcomes suggest that not all voters punish leaders accused of harassment.”<sup>165</sup>

Overall, 13% of elected officials identified in this study are still in office today.

## ELECTION OUTCOME



■ Won Reelection, 88% ■ Lost Reelection, 12%



Then-**Virginia** State Representative Joe Morrissey (D) was charged with 5 felonies of indecent liberties with a minor, possession of pornographic images of an underage female, and solicitation to obtain the images of a 17-year old girl.<sup>166</sup> It was later reported that the survivor was already pregnant with Morrissey’s child.<sup>167</sup> Morrissey agreed to a plea deal and was sentenced to 6 months in jail,<sup>168</sup> he resigned his seat, but vowed to run in the special election. While serving his jail time, Morrissey won back his seat in the Virginia House of Delegates.<sup>169</sup> Morrissey was then pardoned by outgoing Governor Ralph Northam on January 13, 2022.<sup>170</sup> Morrissey won a seat in the Virginia State Senate in 2019, where he currently serves.<sup>171</sup>



**California** State Senator Bob Hertzberg (D) engaged in behavior that made two sitting female lawmakers and a former lawmaker “uncomfortable.”<sup>172</sup> Two of the women said that Hertzberg hugged them again even after they had asked him to stop.<sup>173</sup> Hertzberg currently serves as Majority Leader of the California State Senate.



**Massachusetts** State Representative Paul McMurdy (D) was accused by four lawmakers after he “walked up behind an incoming legislator and grabbed her backside during an orientation cocktail hour for newly elected members.”<sup>174</sup> The Massachusetts House Special Committee on Professional Conduct unanimously agreed to clear McMurdy on all charges.<sup>175</sup> McMurdy continues to serve in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

## ADDITIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

5% of lawmakers identified in this study were charged by law enforcement, found guilty and jailed over sexual harassment or abuse allegations. Given the infrequency of this outcome, we have listed all examples of elected officials who received jail time over sexual harassment.



**Idaho** State Representative Aaron von Ehlinger (R) was sentenced to 20 years in prison and registered as a sex offender.<sup>176</sup> Ehlinger was accused of "unconsented sexual contact" with a teenage legislative intern.<sup>177</sup> Legislature Ethics Committee documents later disclosed that there had been previous complaints against von Ehlinger from female employees and that von Ehlinger had been warned about his inappropriateness.<sup>178</sup>



**New Hampshire** State Representative Eric Schleien (R) pleaded guilty to sexually and physically assaulting a 16-year old girl.<sup>179</sup> He was sentenced to 12 months in jail with six months suspended.<sup>180</sup>



**Virginia** State Representative Joe Morrissey (D) pleaded guilty to Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor and was sentenced to 6 months in jail.<sup>181</sup> He had admitted to having an affair with a 17-year-old girl who was pregnant with Morrissey's child.<sup>182</sup>



**New Hampshire** State Representative Kyle Tasker (R) "pleaded guilty to nine felonies, including four counts of using a computer to lure a minor for sex and five counts of possession of a controlled drug with intent to distribute" and was sentenced to "three to 10 years in state prison."<sup>183</sup> Police received a complaint from a mother that her 14-year-old daughter had been communicating with Tasker on Facebook and had met him in person. In Facebook communications, Tasker offered to acquire alcohol and marijuana for the girl, and proposed a three-way sexual encounter.<sup>184</sup>

**Wisconsin** State Representative Bill Kramer (R) was sentenced to 5 months in jail but did not have to register as a sex offender after being accused of groping at least one woman and making lewd and inappropriate remarks to at least two women.<sup>185, 186</sup>



**Illinois** State Representative Keith Farnham pleaded guilty to a federal charge of transporting child pornography via computers in his office and residence and was sentenced to eight years in prison and a \$30,000 fine.<sup>187</sup> Farnham died at Butner Federal Correctional Complex in North Carolina.<sup>188</sup> Federal agents found "hundreds of images and videos depicting child pornography and [engaging] in graphic online chats in which he allegedly bragged about sexually molesting a 6-year-old girl" on his statehouse and home computers.<sup>189</sup>

There is a fundamental lack of transparency and accountability of reporting inappropriate behavior inside state governments, the norm of which serves to undercut any effort to measure or address these problems. Some states handle these cases internally with no public disclosure or transparency of any wrongdoing. Internal responses with no public acknowledgment protect abusive environments and systems. By keeping these incidents internal, the legislatures are essentially wiping clean their accountability. As with the predatory use of nondisclosure agreements (NDAs), efforts to keep accountability, repercussions and settlements secret and internal to the legislature not only silence survivors, but protect their harassers, who remain free from public scrutiny of their behavior. While this is clearly unjust and grotesque in the private sector, withholding information about a publicly elected government official is unacceptable. The public has a right to know about the prevalence of harassment accusations and steps taken to address inappropriate behavior amongst their elected officials.

*Conclusion: The current system for prevention and accountability for elected officials is not sufficient.*

**Gothamist**

**Assemblyman Allegedly Made Inappropriate Comments to Male Staffer**



**Harassment, then helplessness, in state capitals**



**Lawsuit in Florida Claims Republican Lawmaker Sexually Harassed Aide and Intern**

# Conclusion and Next Steps

This research is only the first step. It clearly shows that our state governments have created a system where those with the power to craft, pass and implement the laws are abusing their positions to shield themselves from accountability for a structural culture of sexual predation. The National Women's Defense League is dedicated to raising awareness of this systemic problem. We recognize that this report is only the beginning of our efforts to change the status quo, and that more must be done.

## **MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED**

This report is a first step towards uncovering the true scope of the ongoing problem of sexual harassment in state governments. More research is needed to fully understand the extent of the issue and how it is impacting staff, workers and constituents.

The next step is to learn more from those working in statehouses: how harassment, along with other workplace issues, impacts their daily lives, career trajectories, and wellbeing. The National Women's Defense League is undertaking this research work, including a survey of all 50 states, to better comprehend how the public data seen in this report corresponds to life inside the statehouse.

A significant effort should be undertaken to gather and analyze the official workplace policies and practices in statehouses. This research should include analysis of employee handbooks, hiring documents and contracts; a review of organizational charts (to clarify who manages which work); a survey of legislative, caucus, party and chamber policies that oversee the behavior of elected officials and staff; and scrutiny of any legislation that has passed that impacts the statehouse as a workplace.

Additional research should be undertaken to examine the fiscal impact of sexual harassment. This research should examine how taxpayer funds are spent on official investigations and outside mediators, or on settlements once these investigations have concluded. Does an elected representative's party affiliation have an impact on the disposition of their case, and does party affiliation impact public funding of sexual harassment investigations or payouts? Does the state continue to pay pensions to lawmakers if they resign after a sexual harassment allegation? If the state has outlawed the use of public funding for survivor compensation or settlement, what responsibility does the government—as an employer—have towards the survivors? The fiscal implications of sexual harassment can be far reaching, and more should be understood about where public funds are being used.

## **STATE GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BECOME MORE TRANSPARENT ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

The true numbers and impact of sexual harassment in statehouses can not currently be measured because most state governments do not share information about the number of complaints they receive each year. Few statehouses have robust, comprehensive and publicly available reporting systems, so it is difficult to request information and numbers when they are not being collected in a cohesive and consistent fashion.

After looking at most publicly available data, it is clear that these incidents are not simply "one offs" or a single "bad apple" but rather indicative of structural failure. American state houses run on antiquated systems, with few requiring transparency on behaviors or workplace safety. If we fail to acknowledge the lack of policies and protections currently in place, the scourge of sexual harassment will continue, limiting the professional opportunities of workers. We believe that by acknowledging this systemic issue, we can begin to address the root causes, and provide the training, tools and systems to ensure that our leaders and their teams are working in environments free from harassment.

State governments have a responsibility to provide constituents with information about how public funds and time are spent. States should provide an annual report on the number of sexual harassment complaints, the general position of the accuser and accused, and any financial transactions that include public funds. Keeping the names of the participants private, state governments could provide a huge resource to researchers, advocates and potential employees by better tracking and reporting on the scope of the problem.

## STATE GOVERNMENTS SHOULD DO MORE TO COMBAT SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The consistent and ongoing accusations of state lawmakers of sexual harassment show that state governments are not doing enough to protect their workers and the public. Put into a larger national context, where the problem is pervasive at the level of every individual state, it's obvious that this is a systemic lack of recognition and regulation, and accountability must change.

Statehouses function best when they work on behalf of all constituents: making the government accessible to everyone is a cornerstone of a healthy and functioning democracy. The issue of sexual harassment continues to afflict all corners of state government. While the post-#MeToo moment saw an increase of public reports and resignations of sexual harassers, no state has since taken adequate steps to protect their workers and the voters. And despite federal protections and guidelines, state governments do not have consistent policies or practices regarding sexual harassment in the workplace. The lack of protections for workers leads to harassment and persecution of women and minorities, many who simply wanted to serve their communities.

Harassment is an expected fixture in political workplaces, rampant across statehouses, and accepted as commonplace by those working there—but it doesn't have to be that way. The National Women's Defense League envisions a country where those who are called to public service and the work of governing are able to do their jobs with dignity and respect. We believe our democracy is best served when those implementing it are encouraged to hope, innovate and protect the public interest. They deserve, as do all Americans, a safe workplace, free from harassment.

**The Washington Post**

**Texas House expels GOP lawmaker over sexual misconduct allegations**

 **NBC NEWS**

**Should sex harassment charges disqualify a political candidate? 56 percent of Republicans say no.**

*Poll finds 81 percent of Democrats would definitely not support a candidate accused of sexual harassment by multiple people*

# List of Accused Lawmakers

LAWMAKER FIRST NAME	LAWMAKER LAST NAME	PARTY	STATE	OFFICE	# OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS	SURVIVOR POSITION	LAWMAKER OUTCOME
Robert	Bentley	R	Alabama	Governor	1	Staffer	Resigned
Zach	Fansler	D	Alaska	State Rep	1	Not Political	Resigned
Justin	Parish	D	Alaska	State Rep	1	Not Political	Did not seek re-election
Dean	Westlake	D	Alaska	State Rep	7	Staffers	Resigned
David	Wilson	R	Alaska	State Senator	1	Staffer	Still in Office
Don	Shooter	R	Arizona	State Rep	9	Staffers, Lawmakers	Expelled
Matt	McKee	R	Arkansas	State Senator	1	Not Political	Still in Office
Travis	Allen	R	California	State Assembly Member	1	Staffer	Did Not Seek Re-election
Joel	Anderson	R	California	State Senator	1	Lobbyist	Did Not Seek Reelection
Raul	Bocanegra	D	California	State Assembly Member	6	Not Political	Resigned
William	Brough	R	California	State Assembly Member	2	Staffers	Remained in office; Lost Reelection
Autumn	Burke	D	California	State Assembly Member	1	Staffer	Remained in Office
Matt	Dababneh	D	California	State Assembly Member	2	Lobbyist, Staffer	Resigned
Cristina	Garcia	D	California	State Assembly Member	2	Staffer, Lobbyist	Won reelection
Bob	Hertzberg	D	California	State Senator	2	Lawmakers	Currently serving as Senate Majority Leader



LAWMAKER FIRST NAME	LAWMAKER LAST NAME	PARTY	STATE	OFFICE	# OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS	SURVIVOR POSITION	LAWMAKER OUTCOME
Devon	Mathis	R	California	State Senator	1	Staffer	Remained in Office
Tony	Mendoza	D	California	State Senator	"Several"	Staffers	Resigned
Sebastian	Ridley-Thomas	D	California	State Senator	2	Staffers	Resigned
Randy	Baumgardner	R	Colorado	State Senator	6	Staffers, Intern	Resigned
Larry	Crowder	R	Colorado	State Senator	1	Lawmaker	Cleared; Remained in Office
Daniel	Kagan	D	Colorado	State Senator	2	Lawmakers	Resigned
Steve	Lebsock	D	Colorado	State Rep	9	Lawmakers, Staff, Lobbyists	Expelled
Paul	Rosenthal	D	Colorado	State Rep	2	Staffers	Remained in office; lost reelection
Jack	Tate	R	Colorado	State Senator	1	Intern	Cleared; Remained in Office
Angel	Arce	D	Connecticut	State Rep	1	Not Political	Resigned
Fabian	Basabe	R	Florida	State Rep	2	Staffers	Still in office
Jeff	Clemens	D	Florida	State Senator	1	Lobbyist	Resigned
Jack	Latvala	R	Florida	State Senator	6	Staffers	Resigned
Ritch	Workman	R	Florida	State Rep	1	Lawmaker	Resigned
David	Shafer	R	Georgia	State Senator	1	Lobbyist	Cleared; Lost Reelection
Calvin	Smyre	D	Georgia	State Rep	1	Journalist	Retired
Joseph	Souki	D	Hawaii	State Rep	5	Staffers	Resigned
Priscilla	Giddings	R	Idaho	State Rep	1	Intern	Still in office
Brandon	Hixon	R	Idaho	State Rep	2	Not Political	Committed Suicide
James	Holtzclaw	R	Idaho	State Rep	3	Page, Not Politicals	Still in office

LAWMAKER FIRST NAME	LAWMAKER LAST NAME	PARTY	STATE	OFFICE	# OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS	SURVIVOR POSITION	LAWMAKER OUTCOME
Aaron	von Ehlinger	R	Idaho	State Rep	1	Intern	Jailed
Keith	Farnham	D	Illinois	State Rep	1	Not Political	Jailed; Died in prison
Lou	Lang	D	Illinois	State Rep	1	Lobbyist	Resigned
Nick	Sauer	R	Illinois	State Rep	2	Not Political	Resigned
Ira	Silverstein	D	Illinois	State Senator	1	Lobbyist	Resigned
Brian	Bosma	R	Indiana	State Rep	1	Not Political	Retired
Bill	Dix	R	Iowa	State Senator	1	Lobbyist	Resigned
John	Arnold	D	Kentucky	State Rep	3	Staffers	Resigned
Julian	Carroll	D	Kentucky	State Senator	1	Staffer	Remained in office
Jim	DeCesare	D	Kentucky	State Rep	1	Staffer	Did not seek reelection
Jeff	Hoover	R	Kentucky	State Rep	1	Staffer	Won reelection
Brian	Linder	R	Kentucky	State Rep	1	Staffer	Remained in Office
Michael	Meredith	R	Kentucky	State Rep	1	Staffer	Won reelection
Jim	Stewart	R	Kentucky	State Rep	1	Staffer	Still in office
Curt	Anderson	D	Maryland	State Delegate	5	Not Political	Reelected
Charles	Barkley	D	Maryland	State Delegate	3	Lobbyist, Lawmaker	Remained in office
Paul	McMurtry	D	Massachusetts	State Rep	4	Lawmakers	Still in Office
Stan	Rosenberg	D	Massachusetts	State Senator	Unknown	Unknown	Resigned
Lee	Chatfield	R	Michigan	State Rep	1	Not Political	Retired
Peter	Lucido	R	Michigan	State Senator	4	Lawmaker, Journalist, Lobbyist	Did not seek reelection
Tony	Cornish	R	Minnesota	State Rep	25	Staffers, Lobbyist, Lawmaker	Resigned
Rod	Hamilton	R	Minnesota	State Rep	1	Lobbyist	Remained in Office

LAWMAKER FIRST NAME	LAWMAKER LAST NAME	PARTY	STATE	OFFICE	# OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS	SURVIVOR POSITION	LAWMAKER OUTCOME
Dan	Schoen	D	Minnesota	State Senator	3	Staffer	Resigned
John	Moore	R	Mississippi	State Rep	"Multiple"	Not Political	Resigned
John	Diehl	R	Missouri	State Rep	1	Intern	Resigned
Eric	Greitens	R	Missouri	Governor	1	Not Political	Resigned
Paul	LeVota	D	Missouri	State Senator	2	Intern	Resigned
DaRon	McGee	D	Missouri	State Rep	1	Staffer	Resigned
Joshua	Peters	D	Missouri	State Rep	1	Lawmaker	Remained in Office
Jonathan	Windy Boy	D	Montana	State Rep	2	Lawmaker	Remained in Office
Mike	Groene	R	Nebraska	State Senator	1	Staffer	Resigned
Mark	Manendo	D	Nevada	State Senator	Unknown	Staffers, Lobbyists	Resigned
Michael	Sprinkle	D	Nevada	State Assembly Member	Unknown	Not Political	Resigned
Andy	Sanborn	R	New Hampshire	State Senator	1	Staffer	Lost Reelection
Eric	Schleien	R	New Hampshire	State Rep	1	Not Political	Jailed
Kyle	Tasker	R	New Hampshire	State Rep	1	Not Political	Jailed
Thomas	Garcia	D	New Mexico	State Rep	1	Lobbyist	Did not seek re-election
Daniel	Ivey-Soto	D	New Mexico	State Senator	1	Lobbyist	Still in office
Michelle	Lujan Grisham	D	New Mexico	Governor	1	Staffer	Still in office
Carl	Trujillo	D	New Mexico	State Rep	1	Lobbyist	Lost Reelection
Juan	Ardila	D	New York	State Assembly Member	2	Not Political	Still in office
Andrew	Cuomo	D	New York	Governor	11	Staffers, Lobbyists, Journalists	Resigned

LAWMAKER FIRST NAME	LAWMAKER LAST NAME	PARTY	STATE	OFFICE	# OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS	SURVIVOR POSITION	LAWMAKER OUTCOME
Dennis	Gabryszak	D	New York	State Assembly Member	7	Staffers	Resigned
Micah	Kellner	D	New York	State Assembly Member	1	Staffer	Did not seek re-election
Jeffrey	Klein	D	New York	State Senator	1	Staffer	Lost Reelection
Steven	McLaughlin	R	New York	State Assembly Member	1	Staffer	Did not seek reelection
Duane	Hall	D	North Carolina	State Rep	5	Not Political	Lost Reelection
Tim	Moore	R	North Carolina	State Rep	1	Staffer	Remained in Office
Ray	Holmberg	R	North Dakota	State Senator	2	Lawmaker, Not Political	Resigned
Luke	Simons	R	North Dakota	State Rep	"Multiple"	Lawmakers, Staffers	Expelled
Wes	Goodman	R	Ohio	State Rep	30	Not Political	Resigned
Michael	Henne	R	Ohio	State Rep	1	Staffer	Censured;
							Remained in Office
Cliff	Hite	R	Ohio	State Senator	1	Staffer	Resigned
Matt	Huffman	R	Ohio	State Senator	Unknown	Not Political	Remained in Office
Rick	Perales	R	Ohio	State Rep	1	Lobbyist	Reelected
Bill	Seitz	R	Ohio	State Rep	Unknown	Not Political	Remained in Office
Will	Fourkiller	D	Oklahoma	State Rep	1	Page	Remained in Office
Dan	Kirby	R	Oklahoma	State Rep	1	Staffer	Resigned
Bryce	Marlatt	R	Oklahoma	State Senator	1	Not Political	Resigned
Ralph	Shortey	R	Oklahoma	State Senator	1	Not Political	Jailed

LAWMAKER FIRST NAME	LAWMAKER LAST NAME	PARTY	STATE	OFFICE	# OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS	SURVIVOR POSITION	LAWMAKER OUTCOME
David	Gomberg	D	Oregon	State Rep	2	Interns	Remained in Office
Diego	Hernandez	D	Oregon	State Rep	7	Staffers, Lobbyists	Resigned
Jeff	Kruse	R	Oregon	State Rep	2	Lawmakers	Resigned
Bill	Post	R	Oregon	State Rep	1	Staffer	Resigned
Tom	Caltagirone	D	Pennsylvania	State Rep	1	Staffer	Remained in office
Brian	Ellis	R	Pennsylvania	State Rep	1	Staffer	Resigned
Daylin	Leach	D	Pennsylvania	State Senator	11	Staffers	Remained in office
Nick	Miccarelli	R	Pennsylvania	State Rep	2	Lobbyist, Lawmaker	Remained in office
Mike	Zabel	D	Pennsylvania	State Rep	4	Staffer, Lobbyist, Lawmaker	Resigned
Cale	Keable	D	Rhode Island	State Rep	1	Lawmaker	Lost reelection
Nicholas	Kettle	R	Rhode Island	State Senator	2	Intern	Resigned
Edward	Southard	R	South Carolina	State Rep	3	Interns, Lobbyist	Resigned
Matthew	Wollmann	R	South Dakota	State Rep	2	Interns	Resigned
Scotty	Campbell	R	Tennessee	State Rep	2	Interns	Resigned
Jeremy	Durham	R	Tennessee	State Rep	22	Staffers	Expelled
Mark	Lovell	R	Tennessee	State Rep	1	Not Political	Resigned
Rick	Staples	D	Tennessee	State Rep	1	Not Political	Still in office
Borris	Miles	D	Texas	State Senator	Several	Staffers	Still in office
Charles	Schwertner	R	Texas	State Senator	1	Not Political	Still in office
Bryan	Slaton	R	Texas	State Rep	1	Intern	Expelled
Carlos	Uresti	D	Texas	State Senator	"Multiple"	Journalist	Jailed
Gene	Davis	D	Utah	State Senator	1	Intern	Resigned
Jon	Stanard	R	Utah	State Rep	1	Not Political	Resigned

LAWMAKER FIRST NAME	LAWMAKER LAST NAME	PARTY	STATE	OFFICE	# OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS	SURVIVOR POSITION	LAWMAKER OUTCOME
Norm	McAllister	R	Vermont	State Senator	3	Not Political	Suspended; Lost reelection
Joe	Morrissey	D	Virginia	State Rep	1	Not Political	Jailed; Still in Office
Joe	Fain	R	Washington	State Senator	1	Not Political	Lost reelection
Matt	Manweller	R	Washington	State Rep	2	Not Political	Resigned
Kevin	Ranker	D	Washington	State Senator	1	Staffer	Resigned
David	Sawyer	D	Washington	State Rep	8	Staffers, Lobbyists	Lost reelection
Brendan	Williams	D	Washington	State Rep	4	Intern, Lobbyist, Staffer, Lawmaker	Did not seek reelection
Austin	Haynes	R	West Virginia	State Delegate	12	Lobbyist	Lost reelection
Rob	Brooks	R	Wisconsin	State Rep	3	Lawmakers	Still in office
Bill	Kramer	R	Wisconsin	State Rep	2	Staffer, Lobbyist	Jailed
Josh	Zepnick	D	Wisconsin	State Rep	2	Staffers	Lost Reelection
Lynn	Hutchings	R	Wyoming	State Senator	4	Non Political	Still in Office

Several states (Delaware, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, and New Jersey) have not identified specific sexual harassment incidents by particular lawmakers during this timeframe, but news reports indicate that sexual harassment remains an issue in those legislatures. (See page 5)

# Methodology

This study considered and collated 359 instances of sexual harassment by 130 state lawmakers across all 50 states from January 1, 2013 to October 1, 2023.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

- This research includes sexual harassment incidents that broke publicly. While some of the harassment occurred years prior, these stories broke, and their ramifications played out, in 2013 or later. The main sources for these materials are media reports and, when available, legislative documents. These documents were accessed with relative ease and did not require any formal requests of state legislatures.
  - » These limitations reinforce the idea that this analysis represents only a fraction of the true scope and impact of this issue.
  - » Despite its limitations, or perhaps even more so because of them, the report's findings are disturbing. This report used publicly available sources and did not include any FOIA request of state legislative bodies. Earlier FOIA requests submitted in 2019 by the Associated Press revealed a consistent and prevalent issue of ongoing sexual harassment and assault in our state governments. Reporting by the Associated Press also shows that state governments are lacking in consistent reporting of sexual harassment accusations and are not providing enough public access to records of incidents and settlements.<sup>190</sup> This report builds on those findings and, more importantly, tracks the incidents in the years following the #MeToo moment that initially catalyzed the Associated Press' coverage. Media reports have been and remain one of the most valuable sources of documentation. Not only does journalistic reportage often provide one of the only records of malfeasance, but media exposure remains one of the only tools available to survivors seeking protection and safety.
- » Definition of lawmaker - anyone participating in the drafting and passage of laws (State Reps, Senators and Governor)
- When identifying a survivor's position within the state legislative structure, we have relied on the descriptions in media reports and legislative documents. In some reports, survivors are listed as specifically as "interns," while elsewhere those same positions have been included in a larger encompassing title of "staff." We have been faithful to the description provided in publicly available documents.
- Our research does not include harassment by candidates for elected office nor does it include information about former lawmakers who harassed or abused others once they left office.
- This report does not examine the impact of this identified sexual harassment on governance or survivors' well-being and professional trajectories, nor does it evaluate the cost to tax payers, though it is objectively fair to say that based on this research and other existing research, these are impacts worthy of future evaluation. This report does not offer specific policy recommendations, though we also believe it to also be objectively fair to acknowledge that current approaches, or the lack thereof, leave significant gaps and opportunity for improvement.
- 13 individuals listed were cleared of any wrongdoing. We have included them in this list because there were accusations of harassment against them. We have labeled them "Cleared" or referred to them as "exculpated" but continue to use them in the overall count of the number of lawmaker harassment accusations.

# Appendices

## DEFINITIONS FOR THE REPORT

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commissions uses the following language to define sexual harassment in US workplaces:

- It is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex. Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.
- Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general.
- Both survivor and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the survivor and harasser can be the same sex.
- Although the law doesn't prohibit simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated incidents that are not very serious, harassment is illegal when it is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the survivor being fired or demoted).
- The harasser can be the survivor's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or someone who is not an employee of the employer, such as a client or customer.<sup>191</sup>

## WHY WE USE THE TERM "SURVIVOR"

According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), both the terms "survivor" and "victim" are applicable to an individual who has been affected by sexual misconduct. RAINN uses the term "survivor" "to refer to someone who has gone through the recovery process, or when discussing the short -- or long-term effects of sexual violence."<sup>192</sup> We recognize and appreciate that "some people identify as a victim, while others prefer the term survivor. The best way to be respectful is to ask for their preference" but we use the term "survivor" for consistency.<sup>192</sup>

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## ABOUT NATIONAL WOMEN'S DEFENSE LEAGUE

The National Women's Defense League (NWDL) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and protecting survivors. Our aim is to shine a light on the problem of sexual harassment and its impacts, and to promote solutions. We do research to help understand the breadth of the problem, we provide education for the public and decision makers, and we develop policies and best practices that prevent sexual harassment and protect survivors. [The National Women's Defense League is a project of the Center for Transformative Action.](#)



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## National Women's Defense League

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

The National Women's Defense League (NWDL) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and protecting survivors. Our aim is to shine a light on the problem of sexual harassment and its impacts, and to promote solutions. We do research to help understand the breadth of the problem, we provide education for the public and decision makers, and we develop policies and best practices that prevent sexual harassment and protect survivors. The National Women's Defense League is a project of the Center for Transformative Action.