



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight

In Support of S.2102 An Act promoting equality and respect in the legislature

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Women's Issues

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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports S.2102, *An Act promoting equality and respect in the legislature* because LWVMA supports policies designed to ensure equal rights and equal opportunity for all, especially strategies designed to provide equal access to employment. Workplace harassment, including identity-based harassment¹, sexual harassment or sexual assault, impedes the ability of workers to function effectively and to realize their fullest potential. By providing a uniform process for addressing these issues, including an objective party to conduct investigations, this legislation will help to ensure fair treatment for State House personnel, while also creating a culture in which workplace harassment is not tolerated in the Legislature.

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that includes conduct that explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Sexual assault is any nonconsensual sexual act involving physical touching. Often identity-based harassment coexists with sexual harassment and assault. Employees that are subject to workplace harassment may experience negative consequences including mental and physical health issues, job interruptions, lower wages, and reduced employment opportunities. Organizations where workplace harassment occurs also experience harm, including lower employee productivity, legal costs, and employee turnover.

By creating an objective procedure for addressing workplace complaints, this bill provides an independent forum for employees. In addition, by requiring annual reports, mandating climate surveys, providing for training and calling for model policies and procedures, this legislation presents a reasonable approach for addressing workplace harassment proactively.² The League, which represents 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, supports this strategy and urges you to report S.2102 favorably.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

¹ "Identity-based harassment" is verbal or physical conduct designed to humiliate, threaten, intimidate, coerce, demean, or disparage an individual targeted because of the individual's race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, genetic information, ancestry, or other aspect of a person's identity, which conduct negatively interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, offensive, or otherwise untenable workplace environment. S. 2102.

² "Prevention is the best tool to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace. Employers ... should clearly communicate to employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. They can do so by providing sexual harassment training to their employees and by establishing an effective complaint or grievance process and taking immediate and appropriate action when an employee complains." U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Facts About Sexual Harassment*. <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs-sex.cfm> Accessed September 26, 2019.