



POSITION STATEMENT ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION

SEPTEMBER 2018

The Senior Executives Association (SEA) knows that combating sexual harassment in the Federal workplace begins at the top. One of the recurring themes in sexual harassment cases is the failure of those in positions of power to act—to take prompt and effective action to stop the harassment and protect the victim.

SEA members, because of their leadership positions, play a critical role ensuring that Federal agencies provide safe workplaces free of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Sexually harassing behaviors are manifested in a multitude of ways including unwelcome sexual teasing and conversations, uninvited touching, exposure to sexually oriented material, pressure for sexual favors, stalking, and sexual assault. Note – allegations of sexual assault should be reported immediately to appropriate law enforcement officials.

When these and similar behaviors occur, we support a prompt and thorough inquiry of the allegations. SEA believes that everyone involved in an allegation of sexual harassment, including the victim, the alleged harasser, and witnesses, should be accorded all rights and available assistance under the law. In this regard, SEA supports an equitable administration of justice, to include due process rights and freedom from the threat of retaliation or reprisal. Obtaining information from all involved persons usually results in a more complete and impartial record from which decision makers have the information they need to reach an informed decision about how to proceed. And if sexual harassment is substantiated, agencies must hold the responsible employees accountable, no matter their title, grade, or salary.

Anyone can be a victim of workplace sexual harassment. In a recent Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) research brief, *Update on Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace (March 2018)*, 14% of Federal employees reported experiencing sexual harassment in the previous two years—approximately 1 out of 5 women and 1 out of 11 men.

Employees who stand up and speak out about workplace harassment must be supported and not retaliated against or marginalized. SEA urges agencies to publicly acknowledge and heed employees, who often at great career risk, report and act promptly to stop sexual misconduct and harassment. Establishing annual “It’s on US” awards is one way to recognize employees, at every level, who intervene when they observe sexual harassment.

Because sexual harassment irreparably harms the public interest, a government-wide response is essential. As a first step, SEA proposes that the Office of Personnel Management initiate a review of accountability protocols across government. It is imperative that when sexual harassment is substantiated, accountability standards in the Executive Branch are consistent and transparent.

SEA opposes and condemns all forms of discrimination in the Federal workplace, including harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex (including gender identity, transgender status, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), age (40 or older), disability, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, or retaliation for opposing discriminatory practices or participating in the discrimination complaint process.