

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Acting Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health



Monday, 8 March 2021

PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN VICTORIAN WORKPLACES

The Andrews Labor Government has begun work on a new plan to stamp out sexual harassment in Victorian workplaces.

Acting Premier James Merlino joined Minister for Workplace Safety Ingrid Stitt and Minister for Women Gabrielle Williams on International Women's Day to announce the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment to develop reforms that will prevent and better respond to sexual harassment in workplaces.

A key initiative of this reform program will be starting consultation on a mandatory incident notification scheme that would require employers to notify WorkSafe of workplace sexual harassment.

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, one in three people have been sexually harassed at work in the past five years – highlighting the urgent need to tackle this pervasive workplace health and safety problem.

The Taskforce will consider ways to strengthen the occupational health and safety framework to address sexual harassment, clarify employer obligations to boost accountability, encourage and support workers to speak up and consider measures to prevent the misuse of non-disclosure agreements in sexual harassment matters.

The Taskforce will be co-chaired by Parliamentary Secretary for Workplace Safety Bronwyn Halfpenny MP and Chair of the Equal Workplaces Advisory Council and experienced workplace injury lawyer, Liberty Sanger. It will include union, employer and legal representatives, and will deliver its advice to the Government later this year.

A new Memorandum of Understanding between WorkSafe and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) will also help to create a unified approach to address workplace sexual harassment.

Under the agreement, WorkSafe and VEOHRC will share information, refer inquiries and complaints to each other and collaborate on inspections, education and promotional activities – leading to a more coordinated response and greater support for workers seeking help.

WorkSafe inspectors will also undergo targeted training on best-practice responses for sexual harassment incidents.

A new WorkSafe campaign, "Let's Be Very Clear", was also launched today. The campaign is a call to action to raise awareness of what workplace sexual harassment is, educate employers on their responsibilities and encourage workers to call out unacceptable behaviour when they see it.

Targeting high-risk industries, the "Let's Be Very Clear" campaign will reinforce that protecting workers from sexual harassment in the workplace is every employer's responsibility – and that failing to do so is against the law.

Quote attributable to Acting Premier James Merlino

"A workplace that is not free from sexual harassment is an unsafe workplace. Inappropriate and dangerous behaviour must be called out and acted on – and that starts with changing workplace culture."

Quote attributable to Minister for Workplace Safety Ingrid Stitt

"A mandatory incident notification scheme will ensure the onus is not just on victims to report, but that employers have clear obligations – and will mean sexual harassment can't be swept under the carpet."

Quote attributable to Minister for Women Gabrielle Williams

"Too many women have had to deal with the disrespect, humiliation and intimidation of sexual harassment when we are simply trying to do our jobs – these reforms will go a long way to improving workplace culture for everyone."

Media contact: Stephanie Jones 0448 359 507 | stephanie.jones@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Quote attributable to Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment Co-Chair Bronwyn Halfpenny MP

“These reforms will help clarify what constitutes workplace sexual harassment and stamp this behaviour out for good, so that every Victorian can feel safe at work.”