



GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE OF ILLINOIS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Advisory Group Statement – August 20, 2019

In June, 2018, in the wake of a series of allegations involving the Office of the Speaker, an advisory group of rank and file female legislators selected Margaret Hickey of Schiff Hardin LLP to investigate the pending allegations and conduct an independent, comprehensive review of the Office's policies and procedures, and prepare a list of recommendations and best practices moving forward.

Ms. Hickey was selected to conduct the review based on her independence, extraordinary qualifications and experience in, as well as her ability to conduct an investigation of this scope.

The report is the result of over 12 months of in person interviews with over 100 individuals – including current and former staffers of the Office of the Speaker and the Office of the Clerk and Democratic caucus members – as well the review of thousands of pages of documents. The report provides an in-depth look into the past and current operations of the Office, an outline of positive steps taken to date, and a detailed list of key recommendations.

We are grateful for those who have shared their own personal and often difficult experiences – both publicly and privately – in an effort to bring positive change to the Capitol work environment. Each story told has contributed to the larger conversation and underscores our commitment to rebuild our workplace on a foundation of respect for every individual.

It is critical to assess what has happened in the past in order to move forward. We acknowledge the report's assessment of the problems within our workplace, including the inadequacies in terms of reporting complaints, inappropriate workplace behavior, not providing a consistently professional work environment and the fact that many on our staff felt undervalued.

Though these findings were often difficult to read, the report further solidified our commitment to provide a professional and respectful workplace environment not just in our own House, but throughout the Capitol. As members of the House Democratic caucus, we take responsibility, individually and collectively, to right these wrongs and ensure a safe, healthy and respectful workplace for all who work there.

As Ms. Hickey noted, these efforts are well underway. To date, we have taken several significant steps to improve the workplace policies, procedures and culture of the Office of the Speaker. These include member-led initiatives as well as official actions of the Office, as outlined on page 119 of the Hickey report – many of which are ongoing. Examples include:

- Hosting a series of listening sessions, organized by female members of the caucus, to informally dialogue with former and current staff and lobbyists regarding their experiences working in the Capitol; the majority of which were attended by the Speaker. (2018)

-Professionalizing human resources by creating an HR department, hiring an Equal Employment Opportunity officer and consultant to hold management training sessions, improving and updating personnel policies to ensure uniformity and consistency, and decentralizing administrative authority. (2017-2019)

-Working with members of the House Democratic Women's Caucus to provide dynamic programming above and beyond the required sexual harassment training. The training, facilitated by Catharsis Productions, provided interactive training and prevention strategies for harassment and discrimination of any kind, tailored to the non-traditional Capitol workplace. (2019)

-Establishing a bipartisan task force, the House Sexual Discrimination and Harassment Task Force, to hear testimony from more than 50 advocates over the course of 13 hearings, and prepare a report aimed at preventing workplace harassment and developing strategies to combat the same. (2017-2019)

-Ensuring all staff has a clear understanding as to how to report complaints. (2018)

-Increasing the number of women in leadership positions, as chairs and members of influential committees, as sponsors of high profile legislative initiatives and in other important roles within the caucus. (2018-2019)

-Working with all four caucuses to develop and pass SB 75, an expansive bipartisan, bicameral legislative package addressing all types of harassment and discrimination. The legislation addressed a myriad of issues to improve the handling and disposition of workplace complaints, including establishing additional rights for complainants, expanding definitions of harassment, and providing additional training and protections for all workers in Illinois. (2019)

As Ms. Hickey noted in her report, an institution can implement the strongest policies and most comprehensive procedures, but lasting change cannot occur without a change in the culture. Though much of the press attention has focused on the Office of the Speaker and members of the House Democratic Caucus, the issues with the workplace culture go beyond any one individual, any one caucus or any one party. Moreover, the challenges we face are not unlike the challenges our colleagues in other states are facing, or in workplaces and institutions throughout the country – from academia to the hospitality industry to manufacturing to the corporate world and beyond.

The challenging national climate, and the hateful acts and divisive rhetoric that have become all too common serve as a strong reminder that our workplaces must reflect our values. And that every person – regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, disability or faith – is supported, valued and provided the opportunity to thrive and grow.

We are committed to working with all of our colleagues to make it happen.

Rep. Kelly Burke
Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth
Rep. Camille Y. Lilly
Rep. Theresa Mah
Rep. Kathleen Willis

Rep. Deb Conroy
Rep. Lisa Hernandez
Rep. Natalie Manley
Rep. Ann M. Williams