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Testimony Supporting House Bill 6352: The Dignity at Work Act

My name is Rosette Adera, I am a college professor and researcher in the area of organizational behavior and more specifically I examine the impact of unethical behavior in the workplace. I have been a member of the National Workplace Bullying Coalition for about five years. I first became aware of the group and its work when I was writing my dissertation on the impacts of workplace bullying on organizational climate in 2015.

I am offering my testimony and my research findings in support of House Bill 6352, the Dignity At Work Act (DAWA).

In various work situations including a position I held as Title VII complaint officer at an institution of higher education, one of my frustrations was the fact that workplace bullying is not addressed by any state or federal law and therefore few organizations have workplace policies to address its prevalence and adverse impact on the individual and on the workplace environment. In my work as complaint officer and in my academic research, I have found workplace bullying positively correlated with increased counter productive workplace behavior including negative reciprocity and work avoidance; increased errors in work product, increased illness, absenteeism and turnover. Some employees I interviewed reported migraines, insomnia, gastrointestinal issues which only presented in the workplace and long after they left the workplace they describe as toxic, they continue to experience post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms such as anxiety, agitation, nightmares and in some cases self-harming behaviors and psychotropic drug use.

Workplace behavior is also associated with reduced productivity, reduced commitment and increased conflict, workplace violence and increased litigation. It is safe to say that organizations are negatively affected by losing talent, time and resources that end up being used in litigation and as well as replacing the employees that end up leaving.

In my work as researcher and complaint officer, I have found a high prevalence of this unethical workplace behavior that contributes to a toxic workplace where the perception of fairness and justice is negatively and severely impacted. It is also my experience that for most targets of workplace bullying, the only course of action offered by the organization is for them to exit organization or be terminated while the bully remains in the workplace. This further victimizes the targets when they lose seniority and income and some cases the cost of litigation. Passing DAWA will not only level the playing field and by responding to such complaints, it will also protect both organizations and individuals by providing a process for redress.

In a recent international conference on the subject of workplace bullying and harassment, it was encouraging to see that many nations have adopted legislation that now helps managers, HR and arbitration practitioners resolve conflicts and reduce litigation. It is my prayer that the House Labor Committee will move forward quickly on House Bill 6352, the Dignity At Work Act.

Sincerely,

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