

Greetings,

This is my testimony supporting House Bill 6352: The Dignity at Work Act. Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.

My name is Cherie Ramirez, and I am Assistant Professor, NTT, at Simmons University, where I undertake research on workplace bullying. I also serve as the Director of Research of the National Workplace Bullying Coalition, an organization of volunteers working to end workplace bullying, which is unfortunately still widespread in the absence of targeted legal protections in the U.S.

Following the steps of landmark legislation to address workplace discrimination and sexual harassment, passing this bill would be a huge step forward to making institutions take workplace bullying seriously and helping prevent and address the problem much more effectively.

There have been many very public examples of workplace bullying exposed recently, particularly of famous politicians and entertainers. Classic hallmarks of workplace bullying include verbal abuse, gaslighting, sabotage, terminations for speaking up, etc. Although less visible, the victims likely experience symptoms such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and physical manifestations of severe stress including gastrointestinal disorders and muscle pain.

In the organization where I experienced workplace bullying, Harvard University, I learned first-hand that institutions readily silence bullying victims, sometimes with non-disclosure agreements and modest severance packages, which is deemed an acceptable way to deal with the issue rather than confronting the bully. This has quietly been done by Harvard and many other reputable organizations over the years, being a practice that has gained recent attention due to the #MeToo movement. While this expensive solution works adequately for the organization's purposes, it unfortunately does nothing to address the root cause: the harmful behaviors of powerful bullies who run their little fiefdoms largely undisturbed. Whether intellectual rockstars or mundane office workers, their victims cycle through their units, often unaware, before it's too late, of the toxic environment that may bring ruin to their careers and lives. If this is truly such a big and nasty problem, why has nothing been done? Largely the same reasons that sexual harassment was under the radar for so many years: the shame and isolation of victims, the risks and consequences of retaliation, and an organization that is eager to cover up its ugly flaws, no matter the cost. Why do organizations now uniformly care so much about sexual harassment? Negative ramifications in the courts of law and public opinion. While efforts at passing healthy workplace legislation to protect victims of non-sexual workplace harassment have been gaining traction in recent years, adequate legal protections do not yet exist that can prompt organizations to proactively address the thorny issue of workplace bullying.

Thank you for reviewing my testimony and hopefully deciding to support this bill. I'm delighted to answer any questions or provide additional information if that would be helpful.

All the best,
Cherie