

Testimony Supporting House Bill 6352: The Dignity at Work Act

Good Morning,

My name is Kelly LaLonde. I am submitting my testimony, on the 9th of June, 2021, in support of House Bill 6352 The Dignity at Work Act.

On April 10, 2019 I was assaulted at work.

I was seated when my attacker became agitated at my colleague, stood up, put both hands on me and pushed me. As I stood up, I was then slapped in the face.

When my colleague called for help it took 17 minutes for someone to arrive. She had to call twice and was asked if “it truly was an emergency” the first time she called.

I immediately texted two male colleagues to sit with me. They arrived in 2 minutes.

It took another 10+ minutes for my boss to arrive, tell me to “call 911 and deal with it myself.”, turn their back and walk away.

It took more than 40 minutes for the police to arrive at which point the police officer told me “it was a bad idea to press charges because I wouldn’t want to ruin anyone’s life.”

I left work, three hours later, without my supervisors asking me if I was ok. I was not ok.

At 8:30pm I was called by Human Resources and told that I was to stay home pending an investigation, as well as threats made against myself and my colleague, by family members of the individual who assaulted me.

We were “to be out for our own safety.”

Two days later the Director of Human Resources requested a meeting.

He served me with an incident report alleging “unprofessional conduct.” I was not told specifically what conduct was unprofessional.

He was rude and angry that I had nothing more to offer than the statements I and my colleague made in writing at the time of the assault. I was told to stay home until further notice.

The individual who assaulted me was not asked to stay home. They were not disciplined in any way and continued on like nothing happened.

Let me reiterate that I was the victim of a physical assault and was investigated for having somehow caused my own attack.

Ah, but you see, I’m a high school teacher.

Does that change the way you read the story?

“There must be more, some explanation!” you say.

And there is.

Our society counts on the “teacher archetype”. We are underpaid, underrepresented, and easy to bully with phrases like “it’s for the kids”.

We are so downtrodden by a broken system that many of us don’t have any fight left in us.

The systemic racism, sexism and classism that pervade our school systems count on this. It counts on the fact that teaching is an underpaid, female dominated profession to keep us in line. As long as teachers are too poor, too scared, and too tired, they remain quiet.

Our education system allows women to be assaulted with alarming frequency in their workplace. That teaches us that we aren’t worthy of being safe, that we must have done something wrong. The system teaches women “it won’t happen again”, and shows our female students that their teacher’s bodily safety doesn’t matter.

The system grooms both students and teachers for future abuse.

I refuse to be a part of that system.

I refuse to be re-victimized by my workplace. I was assaulted and I deserve to be heard. I spent 7 weeks on administrative leave. I've spent the subsequent two years being harassed by administration for having the audacity to speak out about my assault. My online activity is monitored, and screen shots sent back to me, with threatening actions. Although I have a wealth of self confidence and self worth, since this incident I have attended therapy and have been medicated for anxiety and depression. To this day, I am afraid at work because I know that my safety isn't what is important. Image is all that matters.

The Dignity At Work Act would change my story. It would make sure that my work place had an obligation to support me and not sweep my assault under the rug for appearance sake. It would stop the continued harassment from administration, the phone calls, the unannounced check ups, the emails, the rude comments.

Most importantly, by changing my story, we'd change the way my students see abuse. They'd see that their bodily safety and their mental safety mattered.

We have the opportunity to change much more than my story with this legislation. I ask you to please pass House Bill 6352: The Dignity at Work Act.

Thank you,

Kelly LaLonde

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