

ABUSE OF POWER

National Women's Defense League

March 2025

2024 Update

Uncovering Sexual Harassment
in State Government

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The National Women's Defense League (NWDL) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and protecting survivors. Our aim is to shine a light on the problem of sexual harassment and its impacts, and to promote solutions. We do research to help understand the breadth of the problem, we provide education for the public and decision makers, and we develop policies and best practices that prevent sexual harassment and protect survivors.

The National Women's Defense League is a project of the Center for Transformative Action.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the release of [*Abuse of Power: Uncovering a Decade of Sexual Harassment in State Government*](#) in November 2023, the National Women's Defense League (NWDL) has updated its initial ten-year analysis of sexual harassment accusations against sitting state legislators and governors through December 31, 2024. This research considers media reports and publicly available documents of sexual harassment accusations where the accused was a sitting state legislator or governor in 2024.

Our updated data show that there have been at least **400 incidents of sexual harassment** committed by **145 sitting lawmakers** since 2013, an increase of eleven new incidents in 2024. This total also includes four unintentional omissions from 2023's report. Notably, actual incidents are likely three times as much due to underreporting by survivors and legislatures.¹

This report update includes four components:

1. New Accusations

Identification of **eleven new public allegations** in 2024 against sitting state legislators in ten states: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, New York, Tennessee and Virginia, underscoring the ongoing pervasiveness of sexual harassment in both red and blue statehouses across the country, and reflecting a modest increase from each of the previous four years.

2. Notable Trends

Relevant themes from the last year include: **a)** the problem persists for both political parties; **b)** culpability also extends to lawmakers whose high-ranking staff were accused in multiple states; **c)** political parties chose to hold their own members publicly accountable in multiple states; and **d)** when accused politicians transition to higher office, warnings from survivors often go unheeded and unaddressed.

3. Policy Changes

New policies that were enacted in 2024 to address sexual harassment in state legislatures or other political workplaces in six states (California, Colorado, Louisiana, Maine and Utah) while positive, indicate a gap between current progress and what is needed to address the true scope of this systemic and pervasive issue.

4. New National Survey

An excerpt from NWDL's new *National Survey of State Legislators on Legislative Workplaces* underscores the problem of sexual harassment in state legislatures and the failure of protocols and policies to adequately address it. Survey results include that one in three respondents have witnessed or experienced harassment; less than half of all responding lawmakers believe that policies to prevent and address sexual harassment are doing a good job—only 43%; and first-hand accounts of harassment in statehouses.

This research demonstrates the persistent problem of sexual harassment in state legislatures in 2024. The advancement of policies in only a handful of states mirrors the limited progress made to date nationally. We reiterate and expand on the conclusions of our previous report: More research is needed to fully understand the extent of the issue; state governments should be more transparent about sexual harassment; and state governments have an obligation to do more to effectively combat sexual harassment. NWDL goes further to recommend policies decision makers should prioritize, including:

- Trauma-informed processes for survivors**

- Adequate prevention and intervention training**

- Third-party-run investigations and evaluation**

- Effective consequences for violations**

- Public transparency that respects survivor anonymity**

- Ongoing evaluations for continued efficacy and improvement**

- Codification of these policies in state statute to reduce conflicts of interest**

In conclusion, the ongoing failure of state governments to implement effective systems for preventing and addressing sexual harassment is a dereliction of duty that harms both public servants and the public. In addition to inflicted trauma and illegality, these systemic abuses of power impede policy making, waste taxpayer resources, and disproportionately limit the advancement of women in government.

Trigger Warning

We recognize that the resurfacing of traumatic events for survivors and their allies can be difficult—for those whose perpetrators are named in this report and for those who have not felt safe to come forward to name others. We do so with the utmost respect for the challenges they've experienced and the lasting impacts they carry. We do not name any survivors in our Abuse of Power reporting beyond some of the state lawmakers who have publicly come forward as survivors themselves.

NEW ACCUSATIONS IN 2024

Our 2024 evaluation shows that there have been **eleven new accusations** against sitting elected officials at the state level, emblematic and representative of the ongoing problem of sexual harassment and abuse in statehouses across the country. This brings the total number of public accusations since 2013 to at least 400 incidents of sexual harassment committed by 145 sitting lawmakers. (The totals also reflect the inclusion of unintended omission of four additional accused legislators from our original 2023 report.*)

Those accused in 2024 include six state representatives and five state senators, two women and nine men, and eight Democrats and three Republicans. Of the accused, two retired, and one ran for (and won) a new office. The other eight won re-election in November 2024. The eleven new accusations include:

Arizona State Representative Elda Luna-Nájera (D)

In August, a local high school superintendent accused the Board of Education of planning to fire him for reporting sexual harassment by Rep. Luna-Nájera.² A September investigation confirmed an “inappropriate” relationship, calling her actions “egregious” and noting that she had pursued Calles despite his attempts to end it.^{3,4} Luna-Nájera was reelected in November 2024.⁵

California State Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil (R)

On September 6, Sen. Alvarado-Gil’s former chief of staff sued her for sexual misconduct and retaliation after resisting her advances.⁶ He said she groomed him, made inappropriate demands, and had him reprimanded before firing him; after her reelection in November of 2024, she sought to have the case dismissed.⁷

Florida State Representative Daryl Campbell (D)

In November, the *Miami New Times* reported that a former aide accused Rep. Campbell of inappropriate behavior, including acting “like a jealous boyfriend” and requesting to share hotel rooms.⁸ She said she was fired for reporting sexual harassment and discrimination.⁹ Campbell was reelected to the Florida House in November 2024 and elevated to a leadership role.¹⁰

Georgia State Representative James Beverly (D)

In the summer of 2024, a legislative staffer accused Beverly, then serving as the House Minority Leader, of engaging in “a pattern of sexual harassment against her both before

and during her pregnancy.”¹¹ An external investigation of the complaints found that the allegations “cannot be substantiated.”¹² Beverly did not seek reelection in 2024.¹³

Indiana State Senator David Niezgodski (D)

In April, the *Indianapolis Star* reported that Sen. Niezgodski paid \$8,000 to settle a sexual harassment claim.¹⁴ The complaint alleged he sent late-night texts, entered an employee’s home uninvited, and made inappropriate remarks about her appearance.¹⁵ Niezgodski was reelected in November 2024.¹⁶

Indiana State Senator Greg Taylor (D)

On November 18, the *Indianapolis Star* reported three sexual harassment accusations against Senate Minority Leader Greg Taylor, including unwanted contact and pursuing an intern.¹⁷ At least one complaint had been formally reported to legislative leaders years earlier, but no action was taken and the allegation wasn’t made public.¹⁸ Taylor apologized and was reelected as Senate Democratic leader the same day.¹⁹ A month later, three more survivors came forward.²⁰ Taylor was replaced as Senate Minority Leader, but remains a member of the Indiana State Senate.²¹

Kentucky State Representative Daniel Grossberg (D)

In July, the *Lexington Herald Leader* reported that Rep. Daniel Grossberg was under investigation for inappropriate interactions with women.²² House Democrats called for an ethics probe and removed him from committees as accusations grew.²³ By August’s end, three more women came forward, and Gov. Beshear, a Democrat, joined calls for his resignation.²⁴ In September, Grossberg was expelled from the Democratic House Caucus after two accusers publicly detailed his misconduct, including pressuring a woman to drink and asking invasive sexual questions.²⁵ Grossberg ran unopposed in the November 2024 election and won reelection.²⁶

Nebraska State Senator Steve Halloran (R)

In March, Sen. Halloran read an explicit passage during a public debate on obscenity, inserting Sen. Machaela Cavanaugh's name, prompting immediate backlash and an apology.²⁷ The Nebraska legislature's Executive Board investigated, concluding that while Halloran's remarks were verbally abusive, they did not constitute harassment; he received a reprimand.²⁸ Halloran was term-limited in 2024 and retired from the legislature.²⁹

New York State Senator John Mannion (D)

In June, several former staffers accused Senator Mannion of sexist and toxic behavior in an open letter, just before his congressional primary win.³⁰ An August investigation cleared him of harassment violations.³¹ He is now currently serving in Congress.³²

Tennessee State Representative Jeremy Faison (R)*

In January 2024, a Nashville court blocked the release of records relating to past sexual harassment accusations against legislators.³³ Davidson County Chancellor Russell Perkins' ruling, however, revealed a previously unknown complaint against House GOP Chairman Jeremy Faison.³⁴ No additional information about the complaint has been released. Faison won reelection in November 2024.³⁵

Virginia State Delegate Dan Helmer (D)

On June 10, four former Loudoun County Democratic Committee chairs called for Helmer to drop out of the primary for a congressional seat (VA-10), citing a 2018 allegation against Helmer from a young woman at his election night watch party.³⁶ The woman's attorney alleged that Helmer groped her as she was preparing to leave the event.³⁷ Helmer lost the primary a few days after the allegation became public, but retained his seat in the Virginia House of Delegates.³⁸

About the Findings

It is critical to consider the unique dynamics that influence interpretation of this data. Fewer than 15% of survivors report incidents with even lower rates among women of color, men, and members of the LGBTQ community who often face hostile and threatening environments with more frequency and intensity when coming forward.^{39 40} This, combined with the lack of public disclosure from state legislatures on the frequency of sexual harassment, means the reported accusations tracked in this report represent only a fraction of actual instances.

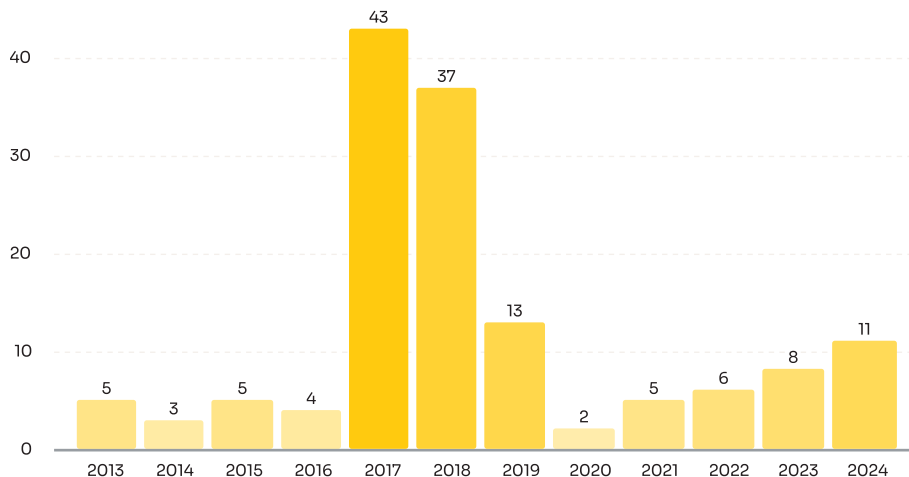
In 2024, the eleven accusations of sexual harassment marks a modest increase compared to recent years, excluding the years during the #MeToo movement's surge. Over the past decade, new accusations remained relatively low, with just 5 in 2013, 3 in 2014, 6 in 2015, and 4 in 2016. This steady pattern shifted dramatically during the height of the #MeToo movement, when the number of accusations spiked to 44 in 2017, 37 in 2018, and 13 in 2019. However, after 2019, the numbers appeared to settle back into pre-#MeToo levels, with just 2 accusations in 2020 (potentially related to COVID-19 pandemic realities), 6 in 2021, 6 in 2022, and 7 in 2023.

More research and access to data is needed to determine whether an increase in public accusations is a result of survivors being more willing to come forward (be it because of better policies or workplace culture changes) or the result of an increase in sexual harassment, or both. What is clear is that these findings represent only a portion of the sexual harassment that's occurring in statehouses and underscore the persistent nature of sexual harassment in politics. They highlight the urgent need for the adoption of policies that will create greater transparency, better prevention, and stronger safeguards to protect survivors.

figure 1

STATE LAWMAKERS ACCUSED OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

2013 - 2024



Corrected Omissions

There are four additional lawmakers who have come to light in our research that were inadvertently omitted from the 2023 report: **Colorado State Representative Leslie Herod (D)**, **Missouri Representative Wiley Prince (D)**, **South Carolina Representative Jerry Govan (D)**, and **South Carolina Representative Nelson Hardwick (R)**.^{41 42 43 44} With this correction, the total number of accused state legislators reported in *Abuse of Power: Uncovering a Decade of Sexual Harassment in State Government* in November 2023 is now 134. We have updated the full list of accused state legislators in the included list in this report update and have noted the amendment in the 2023 report available on our website.

Notes

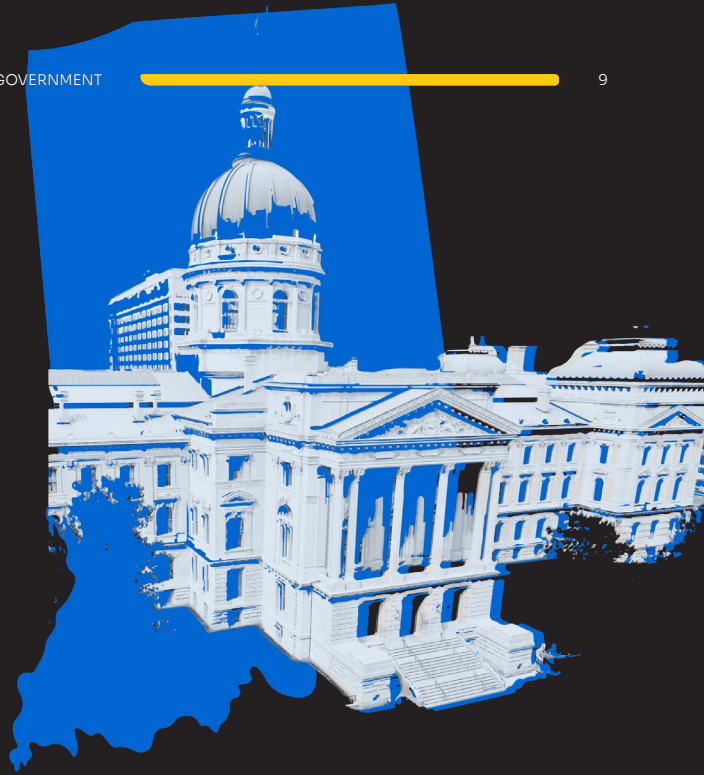
In the last year, two sitting state legislators have faced allegations of sexual harassment and assault outside of their legislative workplaces. This is not something that our research tracks comprehensively, but these high-profile events are notable. **Arizona State Representative Jevin Hodge (D)** resigned in January an investigation revealed that he had violated sexual violence and misconduct policies as a student at George Washington University nearly a decade ago.⁴⁵ **Michigan State Representative Neil Friske (R)** was arrested in June for a possible sexual assault and weapons-related offenses.⁴⁶ Friske lost his reelection bid in the August primary, and his case is under investigation by the state Attorney Generals' office.^{47 48}

In the last year, two new governors have been elected—one Democrat (**former Newcastle County Executive Matt Meyer, Delaware**), one Republican (**former Attorney General Jeff Landry, Louisiana**) — who have been tied to sexual harassment issues in their previous elected offices. Both presided over administrations that had instances of harassment within their ranks. Their previous offices were not state legislative or gubernatorial, nor were they directly accused, and thus are not included in the Abuse of Power report parameters. However their ascension to gubernatorial office is significant, and therefore we believe it should be noted. Any future accusations against these two should be seen as a pattern.

Close Up

INDIANA IN 2024

In 2024, Indiana's government workspaces, including the state legislature, were rocked by a series of sexual harassment accusations that spanned multiple levels of leadership, exposing deep cracks in accountability and ethics.



In April, the *Indianapolis Star* reported that **State Senator David Niezgodski (D)** had settled a sexual harassment claim after sending late-night texts, entering a staffer's home uninvited, and making inappropriate comments about her appearance.⁴⁹

Then, in July, the *Indianapolis Star* revealed that three women had accused **Thomas Cook (D), Chief Deputy Mayor of Indianapolis**, of sexual harassment, with some accusations dating back to 2017.⁵⁰

The political storm intensified in November when **State Senate Minority Leader Greg Taylor (D)** was accused by three women, with accusations ranging from unwanted physical contact to pursuing an intern.⁵¹ Taylor was reelected to his leadership role the same day, triggering an outcry from women in his own party.⁵²

In response to this series of events, 40 prominent Democratic women sent a letter to the state party chair, condemning the party leadership for enabling perpetrators and putting women at risk.

“Leadership consistently sweeps these issues under the rug and allows perpetrators to remain in power, knowingly placing women in vulnerable and dangerous situations. This is a deeply troubling pattern in our Party, and it must end immediately.”⁵³

In December of 2024, three more women came forward with additional accusations against Taylor, bringing the total number to six, and leading to his removal from leadership.⁵⁴

In an attempt to address the crisis, the state Democratic party announced the creation of a new code of conduct and an ethics committee to tackle sexual harassment.⁵⁵ The Code of Conduct is publicly available on the Indiana Democratic Party website. Just one week later, Indiana Democratic Party Chair Mike Schmuhl announced his resignation, effective in March of 2025.⁵⁶

These instances have underscored the role that political parties can play in combatting sexual harassment within their own ranks.

TRENDS & THEMES

Partisan Parity: Problem Persists for Both Parties

While Democrats faced more public accusations compared to Republicans in 2024 (eight Democrats versus three Republicans), this does not represent a significant departure from the overall trend over the previous decade: From 2013 through 2024, instances of harassment are nearly equal between the major parties, with 49% of accused elected officials being Democrats and 51% Republicans.

As previously noted, underreporting and the lack of publicly available data make it impossible to distinguish if an uptick in reporting is the result of stronger safeguards, better policy and more supportive culture or an actual increase in harassment. Despite this, our research continues to demonstrate that sexual harassment in state legislatures is not a partisan issue, but rather a widespread problem that affects both parties nearly equally.

Enabling Harassment: Lawmakers' Staff Accused at Highest Levels

In 2024, sexual harassment by several high-profile lawmakers' high-ranking staff was called out publicly. While NWDL did not comprehensively track these instances nationally, sexual harassment by staffers in lawmakers' offices is a contributor to the problem overall. All three instances highlighted here ultimately implicated elected officials who failed to prevent and respond to sexual harassment in their offices appropriately:

Mike Vereb in Gov. Shapiro's Office, Pennsylvania

A senior advisor to Gov. Josh Shapiro resigned after sexual harassment accusations were made by a staffer.⁵⁷ Despite a settlement, Shapiro's handling of the situation came under scrutiny during his bid for Vice President, and media investigations resulted in a public statement from his office about flaws in his internal policies and handling of the situation.⁵⁸

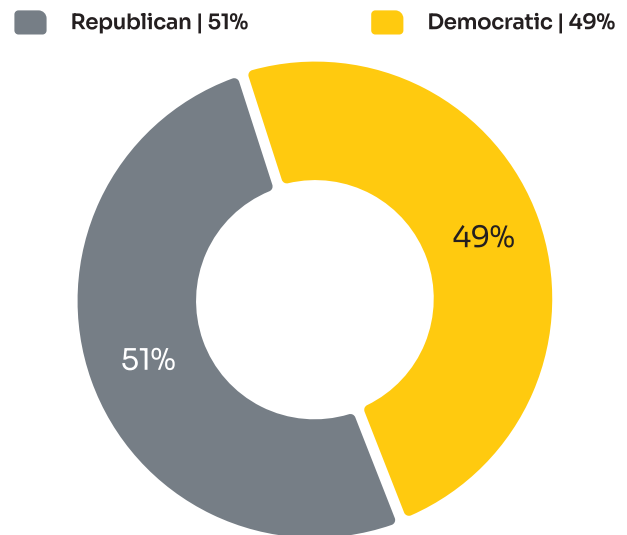
Rick Jacobs in Mayor Garcetti's Office, Los Angeles

Multiple accusations of sexual harassment were made against Jacobs, a top aide to Mayor Eric Garcetti.⁵⁹

figure 2

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS COMMITTED BY MEMBERS OF BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES

From 2013 through 2024, instances of harassment are nearly equal between the major parties



Investigations revealed that Garcetti was likely aware of the harassment but failed to act, which contributed to the initial failure of Garcetti's nomination as Ambassador to India.⁶⁰ The city later settled with one of the survivors for \$1.8 million.⁶¹

Thomas Cook in Mayor Hogsett's Office, Indianapolis

Three women accused Cook of abusing his power while serving as Chief Deputy Mayor.⁶² Despite complaints as early as 2017, Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett kept Cook in his inner circle.⁶³ The situation led to public calls for Hogsett's resignation, and the city implemented new sexual harassment training for all employees.^{64 65}

These instances underscore the need for elected officials to establish robust protections and policies for their offices and to respond swiftly to accusations of harassment. Ultimately, elected officials have a responsibility to prevent and address workplace sexual harassment on three fronts: first, their own behavior and those of their peers in office; second, within their own office and staff; and third, in all workplaces across the state.

Taking Action: Party Ownership of Harassment

In 2024, political parties in multiple states took relatively swift action to address sexual harassment within their own ranks. The three instances highlighted here are an encouraging development, as party leadership seemingly reacted quickly to hold their own members accountable. This is notable as it is more common to see lawmakers of the same party close rank when harassment comes to light to avoid fodder for political opponents. While it remains to be seen if this pattern continues, these actions are a promising trend. Examples include:

Nebraska Senate Republicans

After **Senator Steve Halloran (R)** made inappropriate comments during a debate, fellow Republicans, including **Senator Ray Aguilar (R)**, initiated an investigation under the legislature's workplace harassment policy.^{66 67} Halloran was officially reprimanded for violating the policy, a rare action in the statehouse.⁶⁸

Kentucky House Democrats

Democratic lawmakers acted quickly when multiple women accused **Representative Daniel Grossberg (D)** of sexual harassment.⁶⁹ Grossberg was suspended from the caucus, removed from committees, and ultimately expelled.^{70 71 72} Although he won re-election in an uncontested race, a primary challenger emerged by December.⁷³

Indiana Senate Democrats

After accusations of sexual harassment against **Senate Minority Leader Greg Taylor** came to light, Democratic women in the party demanded action.⁷⁴ Though Taylor was re-elected as leader initially, mounting pressure and additional accusations led to his ousting, and the caucus chose a new leader for 2025.^{75 76}

Promoting Problems: Harassers Move into Higher Office

When politicians with a history of sexual harassment transition to higher office, warnings from survivors often go unheeded and unaddressed, whether they were made prior to or come to light during their move to higher office.

Former New York State Senator, Current U.S. Rep. John Mannion (D)

In New York in 2024, just days before the Democratic congressional primary, a group of former staffers from John Mannion's state senate office released a statement accusing him of explosive behavior and fostering a toxic environment, with accusations of blatant sexism and a pattern of targeting young women.⁷⁷ Mannion was running for CD 22 and went on to win the primary.⁷⁸ An August investigation by the Democratically controlled New York State Senate cleared him of violating harassment and discrimination policies; the details of the accusations and the investigation have not been made public.⁷⁹ Ultimately he secured a Congressional seat in November.⁸⁰

Former Florida State Representative, Former U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz (R)

Matt Gaetz was well known for problematic behavior before he arrived in Congress. Accusations against him range from creating a game in the Florida House where members earned points for sleeping with aides, interns, and lobbyists, to holding an annual "Miss Rotunda" beauty contest ranking the most attractive intern. He continued to face accusations after taking office in Congress.⁸¹ In December, as the House Ethics Committee prepared to release findings from an investigation into multiple misconduct accusations, Gaetz resigned.^{82 83} Shortly thereafter, Gaetz also withdrew his name from consideration for U.S. Attorney General when it became clear that his colleagues would not support his cabinet appointment.⁸⁴

This dynamic is not unique to state legislators and Congress alone. Survivors' concerns and calls for action have frequently been ignored or deprioritized in other political arenas as politicians sought to advance to higher office or appointment in both parties, from SCOTUS and the Presidency to ambassadorships and agency heads.

These cases highlight the need for better accountability when dangerous behavior is first flagged earlier in a legislator's career. State legislatures are a pipeline for statewide and federal offices. Once in Congress or other higher office, lawmakers' influence and power only increases, making accountability more challenging. Addressing sexual harassment in state government could prevent serial sexual harassers — and research shows that most are repeat offenders — from causing more harm from greater positions of influence. In short, action at the state legislative level is an opportunity to clean up higher levels of government as well.

NEW POLICIES ENACTED IN 2024

In 2024, state legislatures passed 88 bills addressing sexual harassment in some capacity. Six of those bills include the legislature or other political workspaces in their scope:

1. California A.B. 2803

Prohibits the use of campaign funds to cover attorney fees or other costs related to criminal prosecution.⁸⁵

2. California S.B. 1356

Directs the Judicial Council to consider gender bias and the unique needs of vulnerable litigants when developing training on gender bias in court proceedings.⁸⁶ This is an appointed council that includes two sitting legislators.

3. Colorado S.B. 160

Requires the Office of Legislative Workplace Relations to publish an annual report detailing harassment complaints, investigations, and inquiries involving members of the General Assembly.⁸⁷

4. Louisiana H.B. 161

States that non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) made before a dispute arises (pre-dispute) are not valid or enforceable if they relate to issues such as hostile work environments or harassment. This applies to all workplaces, including the legislature.⁸⁸

5. Maine L.D. 2150

Mandates annual in-person training on sexual and racial harassment for all constitutional officers, including the Secretary of State, the Treasurer, and the Attorney General.⁸⁹

6. Utah H.B. 55

Makes non-disclosure and non-disparagement clauses related to sexual misconduct unenforceable, while holding those attempting to enforce them responsible for costs and attorney fees. It also protects employees from retaliation for reporting sexual harassment or assault, and prevents retaliation for refusing to sign a confidentiality clause.⁹⁰

Tracking changes through legislation has its limitations, as most sexual harassment policies for state legislatures are governed by chamber rules or internal policies rather than state law and are not available to the public. While these recent legislative measures represent some progress in five states, the vast majority of states continue to have significant policy gaps when it comes to addressing sexual harassment.

NATIONAL SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATORS ON LEGISLATIVE WORKPLACE

New Survey Data Shows State Lawmakers Are Dissatisfied with Sexual Harassment Policies and Procedures

In 2024, NWDL launched a national survey of state lawmakers to gain insight into various workplace issues in legislatures, including sexual harassment policies, workplace benefits, and barriers to success. The National Survey of State Legislators on Legislative Workplace was commissioned by NWDL, with input from the Center for Countering Digital Hate, Paid Leave for All, the Purple Campaign, Represent Women, and Vote Mama. It was conducted by Understory.

This survey aimed to capture lawmakers' input across the country, providing valuable information on how state legislatures address workplace dynamics and protect employees from harassment. The survey requested responses from state legislators directly and received 207 responses from 46 states. Of these, 57% were female, 40.6% were male, and 2.4% identified another way. It is notable that despite women making up just 32.8% of state

legislative offices nationally, they responded at a much higher rate than their male counterparts to this survey.⁹¹

The findings included here are an excerpt from the full survey and focus on sexual harassment policies. For the full survey results and detailed analysis, please refer to the [National Survey of State Legislators on Legislative Workplaces](#).

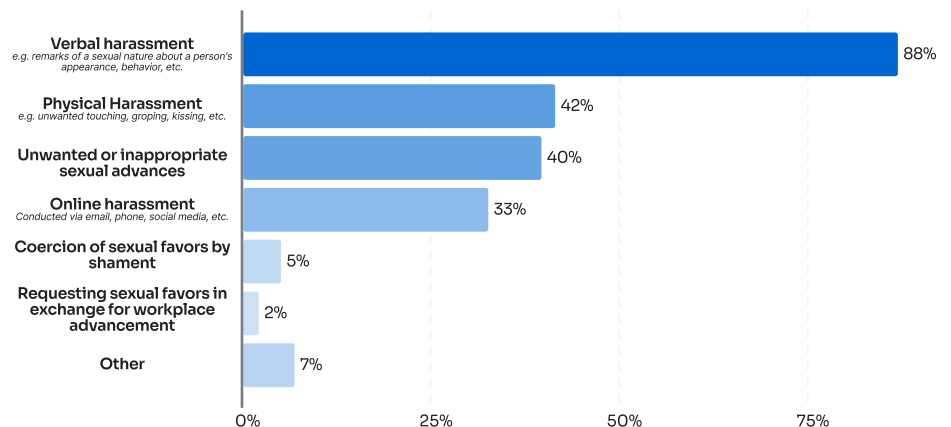
The survey found that:

1 in 3 state legislators reported they had experienced or witnessed harassment in the statehouse. Of those, 60% experienced it directly.

The most common types of harassment sitting legislators experienced or witnessed were verbal harassment (88%), physical harassment (42%), and unwanted sexual advances (40%).

figure 3

WHAT TYPE(S) OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED AND/OR WITNESSED?



35% of respondents who experienced or witnessed sexual harassment did not report it.

Of those sexual harassment incidents that were reported, approximately half, 53%, were investigated. 25% indicated that their experience was not investigated, and 22% did not know the outcome of their report.

Of those incidents that were investigated, less than half, 42%, led to accountability for the perpetrator. 36% of respondents indicated that the perpetrator was not held accountable with punishment or sanction, while 21% didn't know the outcome of the investigation.

Only 64% of state legislators said that their state had a system for reporting incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace. Additionally, some respondents from the same states gave conflicting answers (Yes, No, I don't know) which indicates that even if those systems are in place, they are not widely understood or utilized.

40% of state legislators said that they did not receive sexual harassment training and were unclear if it was mandatory.

Key written responses from lawmakers in the survey:

“There is still a **‘good old boys’** atmosphere at the state house. It reinforces the reality that it is still controlled by old white men who hold all the power.”

“**Many people (often the ones who need it most) skip the training.**”

“**Watching the harassment makes you feel like you have no control** and you can't help the person. It's an awful feeling.”

“I reported a different incident. **It took 4 months to get a reply.** Clearly nothing was going to happen.”

“We have a ‘sexual harassment panel’ that is made up of folks who sexually harass. We need an **objective, outside entity**, ie. a human resources person/office to deal with pervasive issues of sexual harassment and hostile work environment.”

“**We should have an outside entity doing investigations.**”

“**The fox guards the hen house** so to speak. The majority party oversees the ethics committee so it's not very fair or impartial.”

“I think having someone on staff to conduct training and education is important. Right now, we bring someone in on contract once per year. Also, having an **impartial group of people that are not legislators** making the decisions about whether someone has or has not committed harassment. Right now, it's a group of legislators.”

“**[We need] public results reporting.**”

“**I lost a part time job due to [a legislator] retaliating against me** for advocating for staff and lobbyists experiencing harassment. Eventually, the [legislator] lost his position over this and other issues.”

“**The policies are fine, but the culture is... more tolerant than it should be.**”

“I know individuals who have experienced harassment have **not wanted to come forward because they have to identify themselves**, and that makes them uncomfortable as staff especially if there is a power dynamic of the harassment coming from an elected representative.”

“**Policies are decided by “Informal written gentlemen's agreement.”**”

“[Our state] checks most of the boxes” on workplace harassment questions, but its **policies are horrifically inadequate** and lend themselves to even more abuse behavior.”

“I felt **pressured to operate a certain way** in my capacity as a legislator, and it took me a long time to find my footing as I was made to feel weak and inexperienced by the individual harassing me.”

“Because all sexual harassment work is done internally, it is **awkward and ill-defined**. We need an objective, outside entity doing this work.”

“[Sexual harassment] made me feel like I didn't belong — **fear, shame, disrupted my ability to concentrate and focus on the work** before me.”

CONCLUSION

Sexual Harassment in State Legislatures is Systemic

This data reinforces NWDL's findings from the Abuse of Power report covering 2023 and the previous decade: sexual harassment in state politics remains a systemic and ongoing issue affecting both parties. These 11 new instances of public accusations in 2024 bring totals to at least **400 incidents of sexual harassment** committed by **145 sitting lawmakers** since 2013. Based on research that shows nearly 70% of those who experience sexual harassment don't report it, these numbers represent just a fraction of what is actually occurring.⁹²

Our survey research indicates that a significant number of sitting lawmakers—one in three—are witnessing or experiencing sexual harassment. Overall, many reported that existing policies for addressing sexual harassment are unclear, biased and ineffective. Legislators who responded to the survey also indicated that legislatures' current processes for handling sexual harassment incidents are riddled with conflicts of interest that undermined their management, mitigation, and outcomes.

In conducting our research, it continues to be clear that state legislatures' lack of public transparency regarding complaints, uncodified policies, effectiveness of active policies and taxpayer dollar settlements results in a disjointed and incomplete record of harassment.

Opportunities For Better Policy Making

Out of 88 bills passed in 24 states related to sexual harassment policy, we identified six new reforms in five states aimed at preventing or address sexual harassment in legislatures or other political workspaces. Based on NWDL's ongoing evaluation of existing policy across the country, this progress, while important, barely makes a dent in the work needed to address the problem of sexual harassment in legislatures.

Our research indicates that most legislatures have failed to enact laws, policies, and oversight mechanisms that establish safe workplace standards, protections for employees, and safeguards to prevent political and partisan self-interest from undermining the process.

No state has yet developed a comprehensive policy framework that equitably and effectively prevents abuse, supports survivors, addresses offenders' behavior expediently, or holds violators consistently accountable. However, some states have made more progress than others and state leaders should learn from these stronger policies in other states, as well as other sectors. They should listen to stakeholders' feedback, evaluate the efficacy of current policies, and use a trauma-informed lens when seeking to better address sexual harassment in state government. Clear opportunities for improvement exist today and NWDL recommends state leaders prioritize policies that include:

- **Trauma-informed processes for survivors**

- **Adequate prevention and intervention training**

Third-party-run investigations and evaluation**Effective consequences for violations****Public transparency that respects survivor anonymity****Ongoing evaluations for continued efficacy and improvement**

It is preferable that policies be **codified in state statute**, not managed in chamber or caucus rules. This would help ensure transparency and public accountability, strengthen enforcement, create consistency across chambers and parties, and reduce the likelihood of political conflicts of interest while providing the strongest protection for all involved.

What's At Stake

The ongoing failure of state governments to implement effective systems for preventing and addressing sexual harassment is a dereliction of duty that harms both public servants and the public. In addition to the inflicted trauma and the illegality, these abuses of power impede policy making, waste taxpayer resources, and disproportionately impact the leadership of women and minorities in government.

While we will never precisely know the quantifiable extent of sexual harassment in state government to date, the most profound impacts of it are devastatingly clear. As one state legislator responded in our survey: “[Sexual harassment] made me feel like I didn’t belong—fear, shame, disrupted my ability to concentrate and focus on the work before me.”

State lawmakers have a responsibility to address sexual harassment within their own ranks. Doing so will remove barriers to advancement for women and minorities in elected office and on staff, and also help pave the way for better statewide policies that benefit all workers. Stronger policies to prevent and address sexual harassment by elected officials and others in state legislatures are not only a public obligation, but can also serve as a model and catalyst for advancing broader harassment solutions in all workplaces.

LIST OF ACCUSED LAWMAKERS 2013-2024

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Robert | Bentley | R | Alabama | Governor | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Zach | Fansler | D | Alaska | State Representative | 1 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Justin | Parish | D | Alaska | State Representative | 1 | Not Political | Did not seek reelection |
| Dean | Westlake | D | Alaska | State Representative | 7 | Current; Former Staffers | Resigned |
| David | Wilson | R | Alaska | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Lost Reelection |
| Elda | Luna-Nájera | D | Arizona | State Representative | 1 | Superintendent | Remains in Office |
| Don | Shooter | R | Arizona | State Representative | 9 | Staffers, Lawmakers | Expelled |
| Matt | McKee | R | Arkansas | State Senator | 1 | Not Political | Still in Office |
| Travis | Allen | R | California | State Assembly Member | 1 | Former Staffer | Did Not Seek Reelection |
| Marie | Alvarado-Gil | R | California | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Remains in Office |
| Joel | Anderson | R | California | State Senator | 1 | Lobbyist | Did Not Seek Reelection; New Elected Office |
| Raul | Bocanegra | D | California | State Assembly Member | 6 | Not Political | Resigned |
| William | Brough | R | California | State Assembly Member | 2 | Staffers | Remained in office; Lost Reelection |
| Autumn | Burke | D | California | State Assembly Member | 1 | Staffer | Remained in Office |
| Matt | Dababneh | D | California | State Assembly Member | 2 | Lobbyist, Staffer | Resigned |

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Cristina | Garcia | D | California | State Assembly Member | 2 | Staffer, Lobbyist | Resigned |
| Bob | Hertzberg | D | California | State Senator | 2 | Lawmakers | Retired |
| Devon | Mathis | R | California | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Retired |
| Tony | Mendoza | D | California | State Senator | "Several" | Staffers | Resigned |
| Sebastian | Ridley-Thomas | D | California | State Senator | 2 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Randy | Baumgardner | R | Colorado | State Senator | 8 | Staffers, Intern | Resigned |
| Larry | Crowder | R | Colorado | State Senator | 1 | Lawmaker | Cleared; Remained in Office |
| Leslie | Herod | D | Colorado | State Representative | 1 | Survivor, Staffer | Retired |
| Daniel | Kagan | D | Colorado | State Senator | 2 | Lawmakers | Resigned |
| Steve | Lebsock | D | Colorado | State Representative | 10 | Lawmakers, Staff, Lobbyists | Expelled |
| Paul | Rosenthal | D | Colorado | State Representative | 2 | Staffers | Remained in office, but lost reelection |
| Jack | Tate | R | Colorado | State Senator | 1 | Intern | Cleared; Remained in Office |
| Angel | Arce | D | Connecticut | State Representative | 1 | Children | Resigned |
| Fabian | Basabe | R | Florida | State Representative | 2 | Staffers | Remains in Office |
| Daryl | Campbell | D | Florida | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Remains in Office |
| Jeff | Clemens | D | Florida | State Senator | 1 | Lobbyist | Resigned |
| Jack | Latvala | R | Florida | State Senator | 6 | Staffers | Resigned |
| Ritch | Workman | R | Florida | State Representative | 1 | Lawmaker | Resigned |
| David | Shafer | R | Georgia | State Senator | 1 | Lobbyist | Cleared; Lost Reelection |
| Calvin | Smyre | D | Georgia | State Representative | 1 | Journalist | Retired |
| Joseph | Souki | D | Hawaii | State Representative | 5 | Staffers | Resigned |

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|----------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Priscilla | Giddings | R | Idaho | State Representative | 1 | Intern | Still in office |
| Brandon | Hixon | R | Idaho | State Representative | 2 | Children | Committed Suicide |
| James | Holtzclaw | R | Idaho | State Representative | 3 | Intern, Not Political | Still in office |
| Aaron | von Ehlinger | R | Idaho | State Representative | 1 | Intern | Jailed |
| Keith | Farnham | D | Illinois | State Representative | 1 | Children | Jailed; Died in prison |
| Lou | Lang | D | Illinois | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Nick | Sauer | R | Illinois | State Representative | 2 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Ira | Silverstein | D | Illinois | State Senator | 1 | Lobbyist | Resigned |
| Brian | Bosma | R | Indiana | State Representative | 1 | Intern | Retired |
| David | Niezgodski | D | Indiana | State Senator | 1 | Not Political | Still in office |
| Greg | Taylor | D | Indiana | State Senator | 6 | Unknown | Remains in office |
| Bill | Dix | R | Iowa | State Senator | 1 | Lobbyist | Resigned |
| John | Arnold | D | Kentucky | State Representative | 3 | Staffers | Resigned |
| Julian | Carroll | D | Kentucky | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Remained in office |
| Jim | DeCesare | D | Kentucky | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Did not seek reelection; Sued the victim |
| Daniel | Grossberg | D | Kentucky | State Representative | 6 | Staffers | Still in Office |
| Jeff | Hoover | R | Kentucky | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Won reelection; Sued the victim |
| Brian | Linder | R | Kentucky | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Remained in Office |
| Michael | Meredith | R | Kentucky | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Won reelection; Sued the victim |

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Jim | Stewart | R | Kentucky | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Still in office |
| Curt | Anderson | D | Maryland | State Delegate | 5 | Not Political | Reelected |
| Charles | Barkley | D | Maryland | State Delegate | 2 | Lobbyist, Lawmaker | Remained in office |
| Paul | McMurtry | D | Massachusetts | State Representative | 4 | Lawmakers | Still in Office |
| Stan | Rosenberg | D | Massachusetts | State Senator | N/A | N/A | Resigned |
| Lee | Chatfield | R | Michigan | State Representative | 1 | Children | Retired |
| Peter | Lucido | R | Michigan | State Senator | 4 | Lawmaker, Journalist, Lobbyist | Did not seek reelection |
| Tony | Cornish | R | Minnesota | State Representative | 25 | Lobbyist, Lawmaker | Resigned |
| Rod | Hamilton | R | Minnesota | State Representative | 1 | Lobbyist | Remained in Office |
| Dan | Schoen | D | Minnesota | State Senator | 3 | Staffer | Resigned |
| John | Moore | R | Mississippi | State Representative | "Multiple" | Not Political | Resigned |
| John | Diehl | R | Missouri | State Representative | 1 | Intern | Resigned |
| Eric | Greitens | R | Missouri | Governor | 1 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Paul | LeVota | D | Missouri | State Senator | 2 | Intern | Resigned |
| DaRon | McGee | D | Missouri | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Joshua | Peters | D | Missouri | State Representative | 1 | Lawmaker | Remained in Office |
| Wiley | Price | D | Missouri | State Representative | 1 | Intern | Lost Reelection |
| Jonathan | Windy Boy | D | Montana | State Representative | 2 | Lawmaker | Still in Office |
| Mike | Groene | R | Nebraska | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Steve | Halloran | R | Nebraska | State Senator | 1 | Lawmaker | Retired |
| Mark | Manendo | D | Nevada | State Senator | Unknown | Staffers, Lobbyists | Resigned |

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Michael | Sprinkle | D | Nevada | State Assembly Member | Unknown | Not Political | Resigned |
| Andy | Sanborn | R | New Hampshire | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Lost Reelection |
| Eric | Schleien | R | New Hampshire | State Representative | 1 | Children | Jailed |
| Kyle | Tasker | R | New Hampshire | State Representative | 1 | Children | Jailed |
| Thomas | Garcia | D | New Mexico | State Representative | 1 | Lobbyist | Did not seek reelection |
| Daniel | Ivey-Soto | D | New Mexico | State Senator | 1 | Lobbyist | Lost Reelection |
| Michelle | Lujan Grisham | D | New Mexico | Governor | 1 | Staffer | Still in office |
| Carl | Trujillo | D | New Mexico | State Representative | 1 | Lobbyist | Lost Reelection |
| Juan | Ardila | D | New York | State Assembly Member | 2 | Not Political | Still in office |
| Andrew | Cuomo | D | New York | Governor | 15 | Staffers, Lobbyists, Journalists | Resigned |
| Dennis | Gabryszak | D | New York | State Assembly Member | 7 | Staffers | Resigned |
| Micah | Kellner | D | New York | State Assembly Member | 1 | Staffer | Did not seek reelection |
| Jeffrey | Klein | D | New York | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Lost Reelection |
| John | Mannion | D | New York | State Senator | Several | Staffers | New Elected Office |
| Steven | McLaughlin | R | New York | State Assembly Member | 1 | Staffer | Still in office |
| Duane | Hall | D | North Carolina | State Representative | 5 | Not Political | Lost Reelection |
| Tim | Moore | R | North Carolina | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Remained in Office |
| Ray | Holmberg | R | North Dakota | State Senator | 2 | Lawmaker, Not Political | Resigned |
| Luke | Simons | R | North Dakota | State Representative | "Multiple" | Lawmakers, Staffers | Expelled |
| Wes | Goodman | R | Ohio | State Representative | 30 | Not Political | Resigned |

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Michael | Henne | R | Ohio | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Censured; Remained in Office |
| Cliff | Hite | R | Ohio | State Senator | 1 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Matt | Huffman | R | Ohio | State Senator | Unknown | Not Political | Remained in Office |
| Rick | Perales | R | Ohio | State Representative | 1 | Lobbyist | Reelected |
| Bill | Seitz | R | Ohio | State Representative | Unknown | Not Political | Remained in Office |
| Will | Fourkiller | D | Oklahoma | State Representative | 1 | Children | Remained in Office |
| Dan | Kirby | R | Oklahoma | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Bryce | Marlatt | R | Oklahoma | State Senator | 1 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Ralph | Shortey | R | Oklahoma | State Senator | 1 | Children | Jailed |
| David | Gomberg | D | Oregon | State Representative | 2 | Interns | Remained in Office |
| Diego | Hernandez | D | Oregon | State Representative | 7 | Staffers, Lobbyists | Resigned |
| Jeff | Kruse | R | Oregon | State Senator | 2 | Lawmakers | Resigned |
| Bill | Post | R | Oregon | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Tom | Caltagirone | D | Pennsylvania | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Remained in office |
| Brian | Ellis | R | Pennsylvania | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Daylin | Leach | D | Pennsylvania | State Senator | 11 | Staffers | Remained in office |
| Nick | Miccarelli | R | Pennsylvania | State Representative | 2 | Lobbyist, Lawmaker | Remained in office |
| Mike | Zabel | D | Pennsylvania | State Representative | 4 | Staffer, Lobbyist, Lawmaker | Resigned |
| Cale | Keable | D | Rhode Island | State Representative | 1 | Lawmaker | Lost reelection |
| Nicholas | Kettle | R | Rhode Island | State Senator | 2 | Intern | Resigned |

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Jerry | Govan | D | South Carolina | State Representative | 1 | Staffer | Still in office |
| Nelson | Hardwick | R | South Carolina | State Representative | 4 | Staffer | Resigned |
| Edward | Southard | R | South Carolina | State Representative | 3 | Interns, Lobbyist | Resigned |
| Matthew | Wollmann | R | South Dakota | State Representative | 2 | Interns | Resigned |
| Scotty | Campbell | R | Tennessee | State Representative | 2 | Interns | Resigned |
| Jeremy | Durham | R | Tennessee | State Representative | 22 | Staffers | Expelled |
| Jeremy | Faison | R | Tennessee | State Representative | N/A | Unknown | Still in Office |
| Mark | Lovell | R | Tennessee | State Representative | 1 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Rick | Staples | D | Tennessee | State Representative | 1 | Not Political | Stepped down from leadership position |
| Borris | Miles | D | Texas | State Senator | Several | Staffers | Still in office |
| Charles | Schwertner | R | Texas | State Senator | 1 | Not Political | Still in office |
| Bryan | Slaton | R | Texas | State Representative | 3 | Intern | Expelled |
| Carlos | Uresti | D | Texas | State Senator | "Multiple" | Journalist | Jailed for fraud and money laundering |
| Gene | Davis | D | Utah | State Senator | 3 | Intern; 2 Staffer | Resigned |
| Jon | Stanard | R | Utah | State Representative | 1 | Not Political | Resigned |
| Norm | McAllister | R | Vermont | State Senator | 3 | Not Political | Suspended; Lost reelection |
| Dan | Helmer | D | Virginia | State Delegate | 1 | Not Political | Still in Office |
| Joe | Morrissey | D | Virginia | State Representative | 1 | Children | Jailed; Lost Reelection |
| Joe | Fain | R | Washington | State Senator | 1 | Not Political | Lost reelection |

| LAWMAKER FIRST NAME | LAWMAKER LAST NAME | PARTY | STATE | OFFICE | # OF PUBLIC ACCUSERS | SURVIVOR POSITION | LAWMAKER OUTCOME |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Matt | Manweller | R | Washington | State Representative | 2 | Children | Resigned |
| Kevin | Ranker | D | Washington | State Senator | 1 | Staffer | Resigned |
| David | Sawyer | D | Washington | State Representative | 8 | Former Staffers, Lobbyists | Lost reelection |
| Brendan | Williams | D | Washington | State Representative | 4 | Intern, Lobbyist, Staffer, Lawmaker | Did not seek reelection |
| Austin | Haynes | R | West Virginia | State Delegate | 12 | Lobbyist | Lost reelection |
| Rob | Brooks | R | Wisconsin | State Representative | 3 | Lawmakers | Still in office |
| Bill | Kramer | R | Wisconsin | State Representative | 2 | Staffer, Lobbyist | Jailed |
| Josh | Zepnick | D | Wisconsin | State Representative | 2 | Staffers | Lost Reelection |
| Lynn | Hutchings | R | Wyoming | State Senator | 4 | Non Political | Remains in Office |

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National Women's Defense League

nationalwomensdefenseleague.org

The National Women's Defense League (NWDL) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preventing sexual harassment and protecting survivors. Our aim is to shine a light on the problem of sexual harassment and its impacts, and to promote solutions. We do research to help understand the breadth of the problem, we provide education for the public and decision makers, and we develop policies and