

Legislative leadership announces steps toward updating sexual harassment plan

Written by By Matthew Reichbach NM Political Report
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SANTA FE – Legislative leadership in both chambers and of both parties announced a bipartisan group of legislators will address the state’s sexual harassment policy.

The sexual harassment policy was last revised in 2008, which was also the last time legislators underwent sexual harassment training.

The group of legislators will work with the Legislative Council Service as well as outside attorneys to review the existing policy and recommend an updated draft policy to the Legislative Council. The Legislative Council, which is made up of members of each chamber, will then vote on adoption of the new policy in January.

Leadership announced that the working group will look at applying the policy to staff, contractors, lobbyists and outside vendors in addition to legislators as well as “clearly outlining terms of enforcement” and outlining protections for those reporting sexual harassment from any retaliation.

A few legislators, like Speaker of the House Brian Egolf, D-Santa Fe, and House Minority Leader Nate Gentry, R-Albuquerque, seemed to acknowledge a problem with sexual harassment in the Roundhouse when they sent out a blanket press release on Nov. 29, almost a week after New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver announced she was implementing a voluntary training for lobbyists on sexual harassment, and Rep. Kelly Fajardo, R-Los Lunas, said in an open letter that she witnessed sexual harassment in the Roundhouse.

So far, however, there have been no specific, public reports of sexual harassment in the state capitol.

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“My hope is that this effort doesn’t just result in a policy change, but in a cultural change at the Roundhouse,” Egolf said. “If we want our state to be safe and inclusive then we must make the halls of the Roundhouse safe and inclusive for all who work or visit there.”

“I look forward to working to ensure the victims have swift access to justice without fear of retaliation,” Gentry said.

Others praised the effort they just announced.

“I am confident the New Mexico State Legislature’s ‘No Harassment Policy’ will be stronger than ever to protect all of those who work in or visit their state capitol,” Senate Minority Leader Stuart Ingle, R-Portales, said.

“The working group is tasked with conducting research on needed policy changes to address sexual harassment in the Capitol,” Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth, D-Santa Fe, said. “We intend to tackle this problem, and will take strong action.”

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