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Our new brand update!

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5 Questions

for
Assemblywoman
Laura Friedman,
Chair of the
Subcommittee on
Sexual Harassment



1

Has the Committee completed its work; what's its status?

The Joint Rules Subcommittee on Sexual Harassment Prevention & Response completed its work and the recommendations it developed were approved by the entire Joint Rules Committee in June, 2018. Earlier this month, the Workplace Conduct Unit, the independent office created to investigate complaints of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation in the Legislature, opened its doors. The Joint Rules Subcommittee no longer exists, however as the Chair of the Subcommittee, I'll continue to monitor our progress in implementing the recommendations we developed, and I expect that my colleagues on the Subcommittee will do the same.



What recommendations has your Committee made to prevent inappropriate behavior in the future and to improve reporting and disposition of complaints?

My Subcommittee made a number of recommendations, including the development of an independent office to investigate and adjudicate reported harassment in both the Assembly and the Senate, a new policy covering all employees, interns, and volunteers that emphasizes a workplace culture focused on respect, civility, and diversity, and new harassment prevention training for all Members and staff.

"Through all of these changes, we're hoping to create an environment that encourages reporting – early reporting – so that we can address problems before they grow into a full crisis."

With the establishment of a fully-independent office to investigate complaints, and a transparent adjudication process, we're hoping to build trust with everyone in the Capitol community.



Are there other initiatives you're working on to create a respectful and safe working environment in the Capitol?

There's certainly more work to do. We've reformed our internal process, but we still need to work on preventing harassment outside of our own system. **One of the alarming results of the culture survey we conducted last year was the number of individuals that reported experiencing harassment from a lobbyist or member of the public.** As employers, we can enforce our own policies and discipline our own employees, but what happens when the harasser is outside of our employment? So much of what we do every day in every legislative office involves interacting with the public and lobbyists. I'm hoping that we can find a way to work with lobbyists and their employers so that

they adopt policies and procedures to prevent harassment and transparent discipline for when those policies are violated.

4

What are your most important “take-aways” from this deep dive into workplace-related sexual harassment?

Every organization is struggling with harassment, whether they’ll admit it or not. As we’ve all learned, ignoring a problem doesn’t make it go away. Taking an honest assessment of where your system and culture may be failing isn’t comfortable, but it’s necessary. In talking to my colleagues from across the nation and around the world, I’m proud that we’ve made significant progress in California, and I hope that others can learn from our work.

5

How has the spotlight on this issue and the work of your Committee changed the culture of the Legislature?

"I've been encouraged by the willingness of my colleagues and the entire Capitol community to talk about harassment, and take on substantial reforms."

We now have an independent investigative unit and options for individuals to report harassment and inappropriate behavior anonymously. Time will tell if our staff and all those who work in the Capitol will trust the new system, but what I’ve heard in the last few weeks is promising. As we progress into 2019, staff in the Assembly will see new training that will for the first time incorporate the role that bystanders have to play in reporting harassment. It’s a positive step towards making the required training more useful to everyone. One of the accomplishments of the Joint Rules Subcommittee that often gets overlooked is the culture survey we completed last Spring – it gave us insight into where our current process was failing, and it provided a baseline for us to track progress. **Changing the culture of any organization takes time**, and with

follow-up surveys, we'll be able to measure the effectiveness of our new system and policies.



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Special introduction by
Assemblymember Susan Eggman



With **Mary Hughes**
Liza Monroy
Vanessa Hua

About the speakers: **Assemblymember Susan Eggman** is a veteran, professor, Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Past Chair of the LGBTQ and Women's caucuses, and author of groundbreaking pay equity legislation. **Mary Hughes** founded Close the Gap. **Liza Monroy** is the author of *The Marriage Act* and contributor to *New York Times* Modern Love column. **Vanessa Hua** is the author of *A River of Stars* and columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

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Questions? Cynthia at (510) 704-1657 or cynthia@closethegapca.org
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