



**njcasa**

***“It’s everywhere.  
It’s everything.”***

The Report of the New Jersey Coalition  
Against Sexual Assault’s 2020 Survey  
on Misogyny & Sexual Misconduct in  
New Jersey Politics



# table of contents

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acknowledgments .....	p. 1
introduction .....	p 3
methodology / terminology .....	p . 4
who is responding? .....	p. 6
what is happening? .....	p. 12
what is the response? .....	p. 18
what is the understanding? .....	p. 26
what's next? .....	p. 32

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# *acknowledgments*

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) gratefully thanks The Fund for New Jersey, for their generous support of this project and the community- and state-level work that will follow it.

NJCASA is appreciative of Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg, Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver and the Workgroup on Harassment, Assault, and Misogyny in New Jersey Politics, who amplified this survey and graciously shared their time to hear testimony from NJCASA during a public forum.

Finally, NJCASA is grateful to those who completed the survey. To those who shared experiences of harassment and victimization – we thank you. We know that revisiting that harm can be incredibly challenging and we hope that this report and the work that will follow honors the truths you've told. To those who shared instances of observed harassment, being a bystander, and general cultural observations, we also thank you for your commitment to creating safer workspaces for everyone.

And to those who felt the need to reply to the survey with misogynistic, transphobic, and generally oppressive comments, you fueled our work in a way you utterly did not intend to, and we thank you for that too.

*“The biggest problem is that they all think they’re one of the good ones. They’re not one of the good ones: they’re just one of the ones. They think they’re heroes because they don’t hit women or verbally abuse them, but we need to raise the bar. It’s the whole culture, it’s the boy’s club, it’s constantly feeling excluded... I don’t know how to get them to change if they can’t see what they’re doing as wrong.”*

*“Women who use sexuality as a tool to get ahead, then complain when they get ‘sexually harassed,’ have nothing to complain about. The difference between “sexual harassment” and flirting is most often based on the looks of the “harasser,” and that’s just not fair. Feel free to print all of this, if you can handle the criticism.”*

*“The worst part of reporting was the confidentiality agreement... I’m still terrified. Even filling out this survey is terrifying.”*

*“Men rule the industry. Learn from history. Women should be seen and not heard. Short skirts still get the job done at the Statehouse.”*

*“If I had reported anything, my “boss” would have just said it was consensual because I did not stop him, but it cannot be consensual when one is an employer and the other is an employee. He had all the power, the name, the position – so I kept quiet.”*

*“This survey and entire narrative is a fallacy and a farce. Many of these women are ruining men’s lives and careers based on hearsay, and that is unacceptable.”*

***“It’s everywhere. It’s everything.”***

*- A sample of open-ended survey responses*

# introduction

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In October 2018, a *Wall Street Journal* article detailed the experience of a campaign volunteer who reported having been sexually assaulted by a campaign worker while both involved in a statewide election effort. What transpired after that is sadly familiar – the county prosecutor’s office declined to take the case and requests for response and support from political leaders were ignored.

After this story broke, a slow drip began – stories about chairs being thrown during tense policy meetings, the use of misogynistic language like “the c-word,” and campaign affiliates being both explicitly and implicitly barred from talking about this toxic work environment.

These disclosures certainly sparked some action – including others detailing the toxicity and ‘old boys’ ‘club’ mentality in New Jersey politics; a special Legislative committee examining the issue; the discussion of the use of non-disclosure agreements for those on campaigns; and the expansion of the civil statute of limitations for sexual assault in N.J.

But, over a year later, the dam broke. In December 2019, the Star-Ledger published a story highlighting the experiences of 20 campaign staffers, lobbyists, political operatives, and lawmakers – detailing rampant misogyny, sexual harassment and assault in the N.J. political sphere. They shared experiences of being assaulted following work events, inappropriately touched by male lawmakers and others who held influence over their careers, and more.

Here is what we know: for every story we hear, there are too many we don’t. ***Sexual violence is about power and control and there is no system in which power dynamics are more clearly at play than in politics.***

That’s why NJCASA launched our *Survey on Misogyny & Sexual Misconduct in N.J. Politics* earlier this year. It is incredibly common for people who have experienced harassment or assault to not tell anyone. It can be especially difficult in situations where the conduct is harmful and derogatory, but not necessarily illegal. All too often, people – but, in this particular instance, women – in politics make decisions to preserve their own futures, even if it means swallowing an insulting comment, a hand placed too low on one’s back, and worse.

Media continues to shine a spotlight on sexual harassment and assault – but it is up to us to pick up the baton and carry on from there.

# *methodology*

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In January 2020, NJCASA launched the Survey on Misogyny & sexual Misconduct in N.J. Politics. Survey questions were developed by members of NJCASA's team.

Participation in the survey was anonymous, voluntary, and open to anyone working or volunteering in N.J. politics or government, or who previously worked or volunteered. The survey was comprised of 27 discrete questions, which measured prevalence of sexual harassment and misconduct and assessed knowledge, including belief-based questions as well. The survey also asked for demographic data, include race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexuality, education level, and citizenship. Participants could opt out of providing demographic data, if they so chose.

The survey was published via SurveyMonkey and distributed via digital and print promotional materials.

The survey was closed in April 2020 and yielded 508 unique responses.

# *a note on terminology*

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Throughout this report, we use the term 'victim,' 'person who was harmed,' and 'survivor' interchangeably. We recognize and affirm that people who have experienced sexual harassment and assault choose to define themselves in different ways, and use a variety of terms to be reflective of this experience. When referring to a legal or human resources investigation, we employ the term 'Complainant,' to be consistent with practice in those settings.

We also recognize that, when writing a report on misogyny, it's difficult to avoid using terms like 'women' and 'men.' That said, NJCASA recognizes that gender exists on a spectrum and that there are more than two genders. The use of gender-specific pronouns and language is not intended to exclude or assign an identity. We use this language to reflect what has been captured by researchers and practitioners, with full acknowledgment that it may be limiting.

Finally, rather than 'perpetrator,' NJCASA chooses to use, 'a person who caused harm.' Our work to end sexual violence and oppression broadly requires us to recognize the humanity of those who have committed harmful acts and see them as people who are capable of accountability, change, and ultimately, growth.



# who is responding?

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## OCCUPATION

The survey listed ten (10) different occupations that respondents could select to identify their work or volunteer role in government and/or politics. Participants could select more than one occupation, if applicable. Participants could also indicate “other,” and fill in more details regarding their occupation.

Overall, there were respondents from every occupational category. The highest percentage of respondents identified as advocates / activists (16 percent), followed by state government employees (14 percent) and partisan political operatives (13 percent). The smallest number of respondents identified as municipal government employees, at 3 percent. Most respondents who selected ‘other’ did so to indicate that they were “former” employees of one of the surveyed occupations. Many indicated that they had held more than one of these occupations throughout their professional career, elucidating the fluid nature of political work.

## GENDER

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents identified as female (78 percent). 17 percent of respondents identified themselves as male. 1 percent of respondents identified as transgender women and 1 percent identified as non-binary.

79 percent of respondents indicated that they were assigned the gender “female” at birth, and 17% percent indicated “male” – highlighting that overwhelming, respondents are cisgender (*they identify their gender as the sex they were assigned at birth*).

## RACE / ETHNICITY

*Overwhelmingly*, survey respondents identified as white – 85 percent. Following this, the next highest answer with respect

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ADVOCATES / ACTIVISTS - 16%



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STATE GOV'T EMPLOYEES - 13%



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CAMPAIGN STAFFERS - 13%



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PARTISAN POLITICAL OPERATIVE - 13%

STAFF TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL - 11%

REGISTERED LOBBYIST - 7%

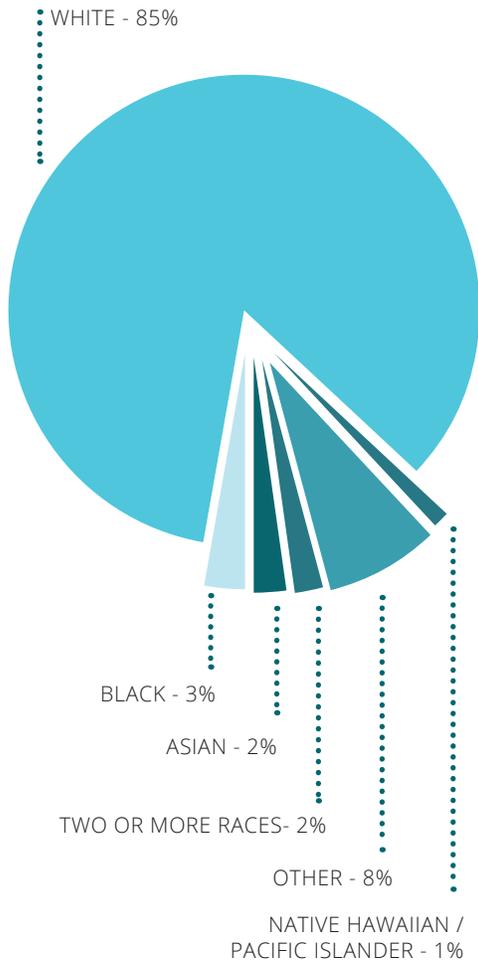
ELECTED OFFICIAL - 7%

EMPLOYEE OF THE LEGISLATURE - 5%

COUNTY GOV'T EMPLOYEE - 4%

MUNICIPAL GOV'T EMPLOYEE - 3%

OTHER - 8%



to race was “prefer not to answer” at 8 percent. 3 percent of respondents responded that they are Black, 2 percent responded that they are Asian, 2 percent indicated that they are two or more races, and 1 percent responded that they are Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander. 9 percent of respondents indicated that they are Hispanic / Latinx.

### SEXUALITY

81 percent of survey respondents indicated that they are heterosexual or straight. 8 percent indicated that they are bisexual, 4 percent responded that they are gay or lesbian, and 1 percent reported another orientation that was not listed. 7 percent indicated that they preferred not to answer that question.

### EDUCATION LEVEL

46 percent of respondents indicated that they hold an advanced degree (a Master’s, Ph.D., M.D., or J.D.). 43 percent reported that they hold a Bachelor’s degree. 1 percent each reported that they completed: technical school, some college without graduating, an Associate’s degree, or a high school diploma.

### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

94 percent of respondents indicated that they were born in the United States.

### CONTEXTUALIZING THE DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents to this survey overwhelmingly hold incredible amounts of privilege – the survey was completed primarily by white, heterosexual, cisgender women who hold advanced degrees. Even with considerable professional / personal privilege, they still reported high levels of harassment and assault, with little opportunity for recourse. This leaves us wondering (and perhaps able to draw a natural conclusion) about what is happening to colleagues who hold less of such privilege.

It also highlights that ***the results of this survey need to be interpreted appropriately*** – that is, they are overwhelmingly framed and informed by the experience of one, specific type of woman.

**46%**



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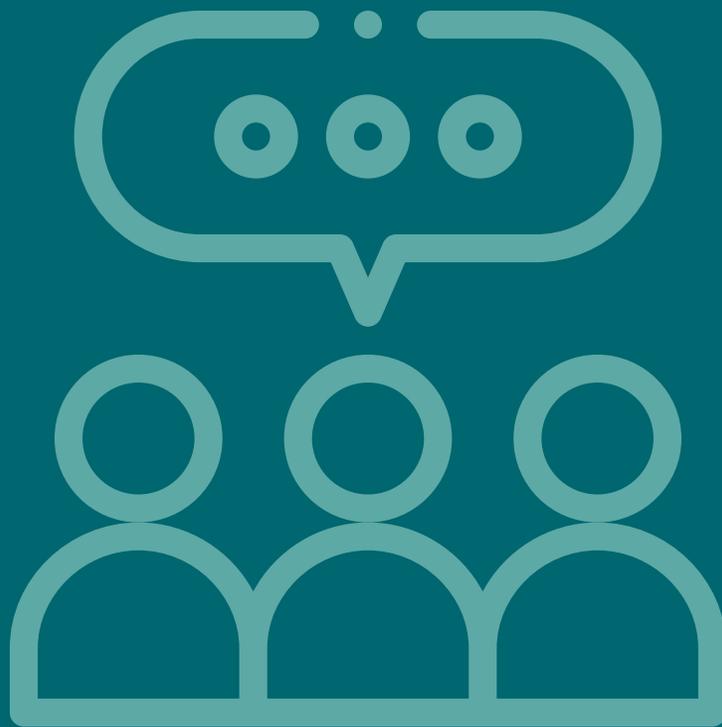


## Respondent Profile

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents hold an incredible amount of privilege.

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Survey respondents were primarily white, heterosexual, cisgender women who hold advanced degrees. It highlights that ***the results of this survey need to be interpreted appropriately*** - that is, they are overwhelmingly framed and informed by the experience of one specific type of woman. This leaves us wondering (and perhaps able to draw a natural conclusion) about what is happening to colleagues who hold less of such privilege.



*“I need this job so I shut up and stay put and have learned how to talk myself through any and all comments. Last week I was told I reached the proverbial glass ceiling here at my office. It’s truly been the **most discouraging and disrespectful experience** of my life and I cannot stand that we don’t live in an age where things are not different yet.”*

*“I have experienced and witnessed sexism in general - women being dismissed in meetings, **sidelined, interrupted,** overlooked. It doesn’t rise to the level of physical or verbal abuse or harassment, but it is also worth discussing in some context.”*



*“All I wanted when I moved into this field was to do good work to make this state a better place and had an expectation that I’d feel **safe at work** while doing it.”*



# what is happening?

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## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The majority (57 percent) of survey respondents indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment or misconduct during their time working in N.J. politics.

- Women were much more likely than men to report that they experienced harassment (64 percent of female respondents versus 28 percent of male respondents). However, it is worth noting that publicly-available data indicates that men are even more likely to underreport experiencing sexual assault or harassment.<sup>1</sup>
- By occupation, county government employees were most likely to report that they had experienced harassment (75 percent).

## 63 percent of respondents indicated that they have witnessed sexual harassment or misconduct.

- Men were slightly less likely than women to indicate they had witnessed harassment and misconduct (58 percent of men versus 68 percent of women). There could be a few reasons for that – first, statistically a lower amount of men completed the survey as a whole. But also culturally, men may be less likely to recognize harassing behaviors for what they are. For more, please see *Culture Change & Accountability*, p. 36.
- Respondents who identified themselves as campaign staffers and consultants for campaigns were most likely to say they witnessed harassment and misconduct, with 77 percent responding accordingly. They were closely followed by registered lobbyists at 76 percent. Both of these groups turned in higher ‘yes’ responses than their other occupational counterparts, which we hypothesize could be due to the nature of their positions, which provide less overall structure and prioritize long working hours in fluid environments. For more, please see *Structural Support & Resources*, p. 35.



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The majority of survey respondents indicated that they had experienced sexual harassment or misconduct during their time working in N.J. politics.



.....

Women were more likely than men to indicate that they experienced harassment. 64% of female respondents said they experienced harassment, versus 28% of male respondents.

## Sexual Harassment / Assault by Type

### VERBAL REMARKS OF A SEXUAL NATURE - 23%



### SEXIST OR MISOGYNISTIC COMMENTS - 22%



### UNWANTED TOUCHING - 15%



### Persistent and unwanted invitations of a sexual nature - 9%

### Gestures of a sexual nature - 9%

### Messages, videos, or images of a sexual nature - 6%

### Sexual coercion - 6%

### Sexual assault or rape - 3%

### Stalking (online or physically) - 2%

### Obscene images in the workplace - 2%

### Indecent exposure - 1%

### Other - 3%

**11%** of male respondents indicated they believe sexual harassment is 'extremely prevalent,' compared to **30%** of female respondents.



- Of all surveyed occupational groups, advocates and activists were the least likely to report that they'd witnessed harassment and misconduct; however, their response rate was still high, with 55 percent saying they'd witnessed harassment.

When asked to identify the specific type of harassment they encountered, the highest percentage of respondents indicated "verbal remarks of a sexual nature," (23 percent) closely followed by "sexist or misogynistic comments" (22 percent). 3 percent reported experiencing sexual assault or rape.

- Elected officials were slightly more likely than the overall average to report experiencing sexist or misogynistic comments – 26 percent, over an average of 22 percent.
- Out of all surveyed occupations, individuals who identified as employees of the Legislature were most likely to report experiencing sexual assault or rape (5 percent, over a 3 percent average).

The survey also asked respondents to gauge how often they experienced workplace harassment and misconduct. Overall, 34 percent of respondents said they experienced harassment and misconduct 'moderately often,' followed by 26 percent of respondents who said these experiences occur 'slightly often.'

Respondents were also asked 'belief-based' questions, to gauge general perceptions of the N.J. political scene. 36 percent of respondents indicated that they believed sexual harassment in N.J. politics is "very prevalent," and 26 percent responded that they believe it is 'extremely prevalent.'

- 11 percent of men reported that they believe harassment is 'extremely prevalent,' compared to 30 percent of respondents who identified themselves as women. The wide gully between these two groups' responses perhaps can be explained by differences in lived experience – which is shaped by each person's own identity and path through the world.
- Employees of the Legislature were most likely out of any surveyed occupation to report that they believe sexual harassment is 'extremely prevalent,' with 42 percent.

- Municipal government employees were an interesting outlier, with the broadest share – 32 percent – responding that they believe sexual harassment is ‘slightly prevalent.’

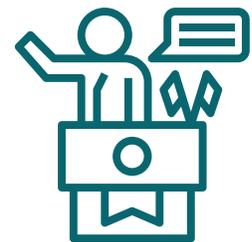
Respondents were also asked about their general beliefs around the prevalence of misogyny in the N.J. political sphere. 39 percent of all respondents indicated that misogyny is “extremely prevalent” in N.J. politics – more than any other response.

- **13 percent of respondents who identified as male reported believing that misogyny is ‘extremely prevalent,’ compared to 46 percent of female respondents.**
- Registered lobbyists were most likely to indicate that they believed misogyny to be ‘extremely prevalent’ (47 percent), followed by county government employees at 46 percent. Also coming in above the general average were staff to elected officials (42 percent) and elected officials (40 percent).
- State government employees were the only occupation group where ‘extremely prevalent’ was not the top choice – 40 percent reported that they found misogyny to be ‘very prevalent.’

### WHO IS COMMITTING HARMFUL BEHAVIORS?

Of the ten surveyed occupations, respondents indicated experiencing sexual misconduct from elected officials at the highest rates (22 percent).

- Men were much more likely to report that they were harassed by an advocate or activist (17 percent, over a 6 percent average)
- Registered lobbyists were much more likely to report being harassed by another lobbyist (21 percent, over an average of 9 percent), though the largest percentage also reported they were harassed by an elected official (22 percent).
- Elected officials were most likely to report being harassed by other elected officials (29 percent).
- State government employees were most likely to report being harassed by other state government employees, over any other category.



22% of respondents indicated that the person who sexually harassed them was an elected official.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

**Who is committing harm?**  
 Respondents indicated experiencing sexual misconduct from elected officials at the highest rates.

- Following elected officials, most respondents indicated they were harmed by a partisan political operative (13%), followed by staff to an elected official (12%).
- Data showed that it was common for individuals to experience harassment from those within the same type of occupation.

**In terms of workplace hierarchy, most people identified their harasser as**



**a colleague who was their peer.**

- County government employees were most likely to report being harassed by other county government employees.
- Employees of the legislature reported were most likely to report being harassed by a partisan political operative (20 percent).

Most respondents indicated that they were sexually harassed by a colleague who was their peer (28 percent), followed by a superior who was not their boss or manager (23 percent).

- Men were much more likely to report being harassed by “a colleague who was your peer” (38 percent).
- Elected officials were statistically much more likely to report being harassed by a colleague who was their peer (41 percent).
- County government employees reported being most likely to be harassed by “a person outside of the organization who has influence over you” (33 percent). Registered lobbyists were also more likely to report this (33 percent, over an average of 22 percent).
- Both state and county government employees were most likely to report being harassed by “a superior who is not your boss or manager.”

### WHERE IS IT HAPPENING?

In terms of where harassment is happening, most respondents indicated that they were harassed at outside events that they were expected to attend as part of their job (38 percent), only slightly outpacing harassment that occurred in the office (35 percent).

- Respondents who identified as male were much more likely to report that they were harassed at social events with the people with whom they work (50 percent).
- Registered lobbyists were much more likely to say they were harassed at events they were expected to be at as part of their job (50 percent, over an average of 38 percent).
- Elected officials were statistically less likely to report that they experienced harassment in the office or regular workplace (23



Most survey respondents indicated that they were harassed at outside events that they were expected to attend as part of their job.



Registered lobbyists were much more likely to say they were harassed at events they were expected to be at as part of their job.



# what is the response?

## REPORTING

Most respondents indicated that when they experienced harassment and misconduct, they told a friend / family member (28 percent) or a colleague (24 percent). This is reflective of what we know to be true – overwhelmingly, survivors will choose to confide in those close to them and not necessarily make a report through a “formal” channel.<sup>23</sup> 21 percent did not tell anyone what happened.

Just 1 percent of respondents indicated that they reported to law enforcement or filed a claim with a government agency. 0 percent called a sexual violence hotline.

- Respondents who identified as male were most likely to indicate that they did not tell anyone what happened (28 percent), over any other response option.
- Elected officials were also more likely to indicate that they “did not tell anyone what happened,” over any other response (27 percent).
- These results reflect what we hear often from survivors – that they are not necessarily looking to make an ‘official’ report regarding the abuse they’ve experienced, but rather will confide in someone close to them. This underscores why it’s essential to incorporate training for all employees, to understand how to respond if someone discloses to you. For more, please see *Education & Training*, p. 32.

These returns also indicate that many individuals who experience harmful behaviors make the choice not to tell anyone. We see two important takeaways here:

1. When looking at the types of harassment / violence that respondents reported, most is conduct that isn’t necessarily



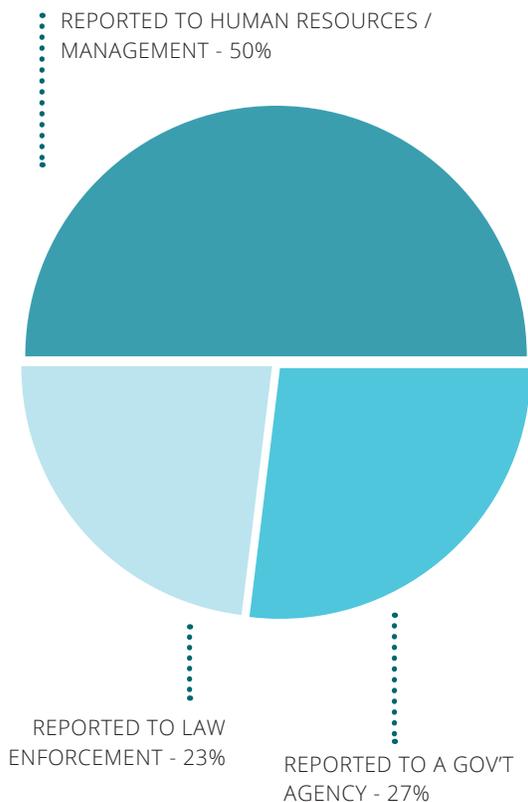
Most respondents indicated that when they experienced harassment or misconduct, they told a friend / family member, or a work colleague - overwhelmingly, people they knew + trusted.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### Who hears reports?

Overwhelmingly, people confide in those they know and trust.

- Survivors often are not looking to make an ‘official’ report, but rather will confide in someone close to them.
- This underscores why it’s essential to incorporate training for all employees on responding to disclosures.
- The response of the person who is being disclosed to is critical to shaping the survivor’s next choices.



prosecutable under law, but will contribute to a toxic and discriminatory work environment, which is why it's critical that we strengthen processes for accountability across the board. For more, please see *Culture Change & Accountability*, p. 36.

2. While it's important to create pathways to accountability for everyone who wants one and create environments where all reported misbehavior is taken seriously, it's important to balance this with the knowledge that for some individuals, officially "reporting" the inappropriate and harmful behavior will never be a desired or comfortable option. Therefore, we must invest not just in how to respond, but also in how to prevent these behaviors.

Of those who indicated that they filed a "formal" report, respondents were asked how satisfied / dissatisfied they were with reporting sexual harassment / misconduct. Respondents were allowed to pick multiple types of reports.

- 50 percent of respondents to this question indicated that they reported to human resources / management
  - o Overall, 32 percent were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied," closely followed by 29 percent and 27 percent who were "dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied," respectively.
  - o Respondents who identified themselves as Hispanic / Latinx were much more likely to report being "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with reporting to human resources / management (43 percent and 29 percent, respectively).
  - o With the caveat that the male respondents to this question was very low, 33 percent reported being "satisfied" with the human resources / management report, and 22 percent were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied."
- 27 percent of respondents to this question indicated that they reported to a government agency
  - o 63 percent responded that they were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied." 28 percent were "very dissatisfied."
- 23 percent of respondents to this question indicated that they reported to law enforcement
  - o 78 percent were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied." 19 percent were "very dissatisfied." 0 percent report being

0%



No respondents reported being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their experience reporting to law enforcement.

“very satisfied” or “satisfied.”

- o With the caveat that the male respondents to this question was very low, 33 percent reported being “very dissatisfied” with the law enforcement process, compared to 14 percent of female respondents.

Survivors are often asked why they didn’t report; these survey responses highlight the inability of various reporting systems to meet the needs of those who have been harmed.

Respondents who indicated that they did not report harassment or assault were asked to choose from a list of reasons why. The largest share, 18 percent, said they feared retaliation; 17 percent said they did not think that reporting would help; 15 percent indicated a “fear of public or social backlash.”

- While responses from those who identified as Black were limited, it is notable that they were slightly more likely to report a ‘fear of retaliation’ (25 percent). These respondents were also significantly more likely, over the average, to report that they believed the “position of the harasser could influence the results of the reporting” (19 percent, versus a 10 percent average).
- Respondents who identified themselves as male were significantly more likely to report that they were “not sure if it qualified as harassment” (17 percent, over a 9 percent average). They were also more likely to say they “did not know how to report” (10 percent, over a 4 percent average).
  - o This response rate might be reflective of deeply held cultural assumptions around who “can” be victimized, or what harassment might look like across the spectrum of gender.
- Elected officials were slightly more likely to report that they “did not think reporting would help” (24 percent).
- Campaign staffers were slightly more likely to report that they feared retaliation (21 percent, over an 18 percent average). This could be reflective of N.J.’s “small world” for political campaigns, where power brokers wield influence across the sector.
- Employees of the Legislature were the most likely out of any to respond that they “did not know how to report.” Interestingly, later in the report, we will see that their overall knowledge is higher than any of their counterparts – see p. 26 for more.

## Why respondents chose not to report

### FEAR OF RETALIATION - 18%



### DID NOT THINK REPORTING WOULD HELP - 17%



### FEAR OF PUBLIC / SOCIAL BACKLASH - 15%



### FEAR OF NOT BEING BELIEVED - 12%

### POSITION OF HARASSER COULD INFLUENCE RESULTS OF REPORTING - 10%

### NOT SURE IT QUALIFIED AS HARASSMENT - 9%

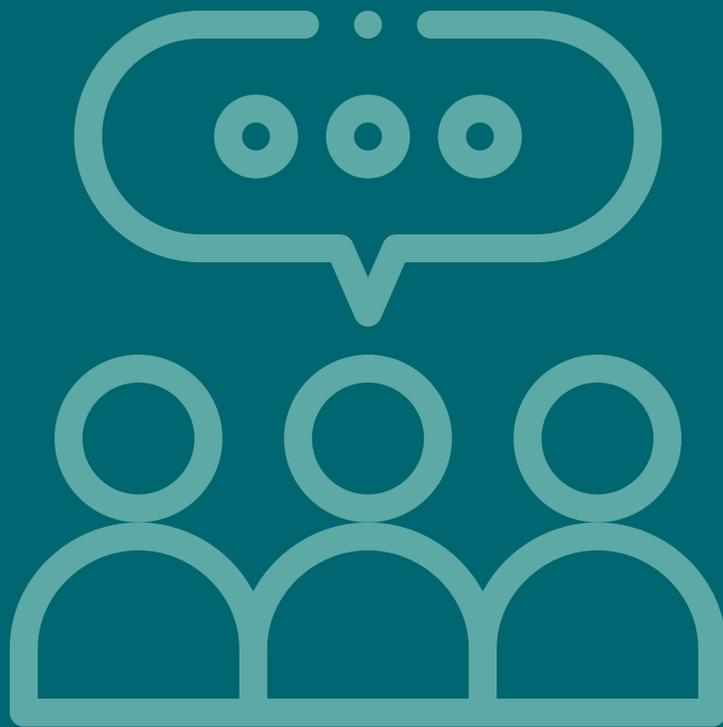
### DID NOT WANT ACTION TAKEN - 4%

### DID NOT WANT HARASSER TO GET IN TROUBLE - 4%

### DID NOT KNOW HOW TO REPORT - 4%

### ADVISED OR PRESSURED NOT TO REPORT - 2%

### OTHER - 3%



*“There’s a lot of retribution for speaking up against being treated differently as a woman. I believe speaking up to my boss against other employees **cost me my job.** So many women know this and avoid doing much about it unless they have a lot of clout.”*

*“I am horrified by the **gap in pay** in many municipalities for women in the workplace. The male jobs are usually covered by unions, and the office workers many times are not.”*



*“One mayor I worked for in a previous town actually said that I could not compare my salary to a male because, and I quote, ‘My salary was **just pin money.**’”*

## OUTCOMES / RESPONSE

When asked what the ideal outcome of reporting would be, 24 percent of respondents replied “an apology” and 24 percent also replied a “termination of employment.” Similarly to the findings outlined above, this underscores two major themes:

1. No two survivors are going to want the same outcomes in terms of accountability for the person who harmed them. The two top answers to this question are, arguable, polar opposites. For some survivors, an acknowledgment of harm and a sincere apology is what is going to provide healing and wellness; for others, accountability in the form of termination or losing management responsibilities is going to be what feels most like justice.
2. The problem is, for too many individuals, the only way they currently can get any measure of ‘justice’ is by pursuing those more permanent, administrative solutions, even if they did feel “an apology” would have sufficed. We have the opportunity to reimagine what accountability in this space can look like, and build structures and response systems that are truly reflective of what people who are harmed are looking for. See *Structural Support & Resources*, p. 35.



24% of respondents indicated that “an apology” would be a sufficient outcome and 24% also replied “termination of employment,” further underscoring that no two survivors are going to want the same outcome.

Many participants also noted in the comments that they felt the outcome should be scalable with the harm, and that they found the question difficult to answer for that reason.

The **chart on the facing page** compares responses answers to two discrete questions – what people think that they would do if they witnessed sexual harassment or misconduct, versus what folks reported actually doing.

- Notably, there is a large discrepancy between ‘not do or say anything in response’ – only 6 percent reported that they thought they would do that, versus 26 percent who actually did.
- This isn’t altogether surprising and underscores a need for continued training on bystander intervention. Oftentimes, people assume that they would ‘know’ how to react or what to say if they witness something harmful, but trainings that build the capacity for intervention is necessary, as these are largely under-developed skills. Such trainings *prepare* participants for action so they can *successful interrupt harmful situations as they occur*, which may help close the large berth between perceived and actual actions. For more, please see *Education & Training*, p. 32.
- Additionally, there is a large discrepancy between people who believed they would report within their organization (19 percent) and folks who actually did (9 percent).
- On the bright side, 30 percent of respondents reported that they ‘offer[ed] support to the person who was harassed,” which highlights the importance of continued public education so that those who hear disclosures to respond in a trauma-informed way.
- Individuals who indicated ‘other’ offered a range of responses to this question. Many, many respondents indicated that their response would depend on what type of harassment / misconduct that they were witnessing.

	What people <i>thought</i> they would do if they witnessed harassment	What people <i>actually</i> did when they witnessed harassment
Not say or do anything in response	6%	26%
Intervene on the spot	22%	18%
Tell the harasser later that their conduct was wrong	14%	14%
Report it within the organization	19%	9%
Report it to law enforcement	4%	0%
File a claim with a government agency	4%	0%
Call a hotline	1%	0%
Offer support to the person who was harassed	26%	30%
Other	4%	3%



# what is the understanding?

## REPORTING KNOWLEDGE

In addition to collecting information about direct experiences, the survey also sought to assess participants' knowledge regarding reporting harassment or misconduct.

As outlined earlier in the report, we acknowledge that making an "official" report within an organization might not be a desired response for some people who have been harmed. We can both balance the various desired outcomes that people are looking for with strengthening the organizational response to misconduct. Respondents were asked to indicate if they knew how to report harassment / misconduct from a range of occupations.

Overall, respondents indicated the highest degree of knowledge in how to report harassment from the staff to an elected official (46 percent ) and elected officials themselves (41 percent).

Off all the surveyed occupations, folks reported the lowest overall knowledge of how to report harassment from lobbyists. Just 21 percent of respondents identified that they knew how to report harassment and misconduct from a registered lobbyist.

- Employees of the Legislature were exceedingly more likely to know how to report lobbyists, with 46 percent saying "yes."
- Registered lobbyists were statistically more likely to report that they experienced harassment / assault by another lobbyist (21 percent, over a 9 percent general average). Lobbyists also reported lower than average knowledge of how to report another lobbyist (19 percent, versus an average of 21 percent).

Overall, 24 percent of respondents indicated that they knew how to report a partisan political operative. The highest were employees of the Legislature (42 percent) and the lowest were registered lobbyists (16 percent).

- Employees of the Legislature were most likely to report being harassed by partisan political operatives; however, they also



Overall, most respondents indicated that they knew how to report staff members to an elected official (46%) and elected officials themselves (41%).

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

#### Reporting harassment

Respondents overall indicated low knowledge on how to report

- Employees of the Legislature reported the highest overall knowledge about how to report misbehavior from various sectors.
- Lobbyists reported the lowest overall knowledge of how to report misbehavior.
- Though respondents most reported misconduct from elected officials, there is also high overall knowledge of how to report them.

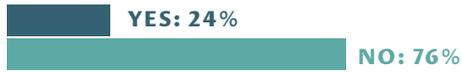
**Would you know where to file a complaint if you experienced harassment / misconduct from a ...**

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**REGISTERED LOBBYIST**



**PARTISAN POLITICAL OPERATIVE**



**ADVOCATE / ACTIVIST**



**ELECTED OFFICIAL**



**STAFF TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL**



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**55%**



Employees of the Legislature reported the highest overall knowledge of how to file a report.

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reported the highest overall knowledge of HOW to report them.

Overall, 23 percent of respondents indicated that they knew how to report harassment from an advocate or activist.

- Lobbyists reported a markedly lower knowledge of how to report advocates/activists – 9 percent said “yes,” compared to a 23 percent average across the board.
- Employees of the Legislature reported the highest overall knowledge of how to report advocates or activists – 48 percent responded yes, over double the average for this group.
- Advocates / activists were most likely to be harmed by other advocates / activists (13 percent). The next highest percentage of folks who reported being harmed by advocates / activists were registered lobbyists (11 percent). Registered lobbyists disproportionately reported not knowing how to report harassment / assault by an advocate or activist, far lower than any of their other counterparts.

41 percent of respondents indicated that they knew how to report harassment by an elected official.

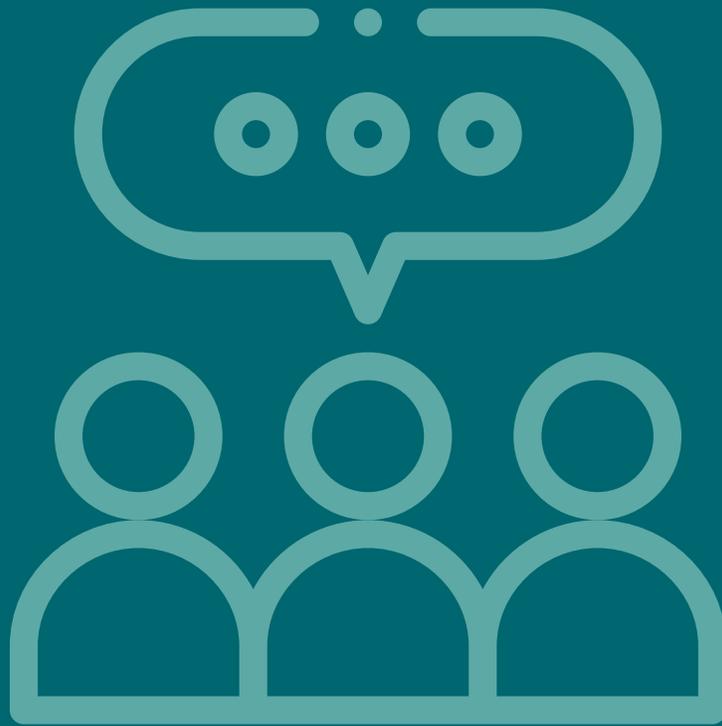
- While overall most survey respondents indicated that they were harmed by an elected official (22 percent), the overall response rate of folks who indicated that they know how to report elected officials’ misbehavior is encouraging. Across the board of surveyed occupations, 31 percent of respondents indicated affirmatively that they knew how to report. At 41 percent, knowledge of how to report elected officials is markedly higher.

Of all surveyed occupations, most respondents overall indicated that they knew how to report harassment by the staff of an elected official, with 46 percent affirming “yes.”

- This average may be skewed by a large share of those “yeses” coming from employees of the Legislature, with 77 percent.
- Advocates and activists were the lowest share here, with just 39 percent indicating that they knew how to report.

Overall, employees of the Legislature reported the highest knowledge of how to file a report across all surveyed occupations, with 55 percent responding “yes” that they have knowledge of how to report. Lobbyists were the lowest overall, with 25 percent.

	The person who assaulted me was a...	I know how to report misconduct by a...
Registered lobbyist	9%	YES: 21% NO: 79%
Partisan political operative	13%	YES: 24% NO: 76%
Advocate / activist	6%	YES: 23% NO: 77%
Elected official	22%	YES: 41% NO: 59%
Staff to an elected official	12%	YES: 46% NO: 54%



*“Legislature needs an HR department. District offices operate like a private company. No personnel consistency between offices. **Members abuse powers** over staff, favoritism, questionable hires. Let’s stop talking about sexual harassment and start talking about harassment and abuse of power as a whole.”*

“The men in politics tend to **‘throw us a bone’** to keep us quiet or appease us instead of giving us a seat at the table to make decisions and changes.”



“It’s **not all big stuff**, it’s the constant parade of minor comments, small lower back touches, felt on the aggregate.”



# what's next?

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This report has highlighted the lived experiences of respondents involved in N.J. politics and it's clear that there is work to be done when it comes to addressing the impact and prevalence of inappropriate conduct. By improving and implementing rigorous training and education on the dynamics of sexual harassment, creating structural systemic supports within the political realm, and cultivating a culture of change and accountability in Trenton and beyond, we can address the issue of sexual harassment and misogyny while charting a path forward for a safer, more equitable environment.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

As the data shows, there is a dearth in knowledge in several key areas:

- What sexual harassment is (9 percent of respondents indicated that they weren't sure if what they experienced qualified as sexual harassment)
- How to report misconduct (69 percent of respondents indicated that they did not know how to report misconduct)
- How to intervene when witnessing abusive actions (When asked how they would respond if they witnessed sexual harassment / misconduct, just 6 percent of respondents indicated that they would "not say to do anything in response," yet when asked about actual behavior, 26 percent reported that they did not do or say anything.)

**Increasing access to training and education could address these gaps in knowledge.** With full recognition that implementing standard training across the disparate and oftentimes amorphous professions that make up the N.J. political sphere (lobbyists, advocates / activists, campaign staff/consultants) may be difficult, training implemented even within these siloed professions can be effective.



The majority of respondents (69%) indicated that they did not know how to report sexual misconduct.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### Where do we go from here?

The response to harassment and misogyny must happen on the individual, community, and societal levels.

- Increased access to education and training, particularly for disparate occupations, will address gaps in knowledge.
- Structural supports can help standardize responses to violence.
- Large-scale cultural change will ultimately make violence unacceptable.

Training topics should include:

- *Framing about sexual violence:* It is not uncommon for people to solely associate penetrative rape as sexual violence, when the reality is that sexual violence encompasses a wide range of behaviors – including unwanted sexual comments or touching, displaying sexually-offensive materials in the workplace, and more. A training that enumerates the breadth of behaviors that fall under the category of “sexual violence,” emphasizes that sexual violence can affect people of all genders, and shares facts and figures regarding the prevalence of sexual violence will help provide a general framework for expanding knowledge.
- *Responding to disclosures:* 28 percent of respondents indicated that they “told a friend of family member” in the aftermath of experiencing sexual harassment / misconduct. This is consistent with what we know generally – people who experience sexual harm will often confide in close friends or family before police or other “official” reporting venues.<sup>2,3</sup> For that reason, it’s critically important that people have a general knowledge and awareness of what to say (and what not to say) if someone discloses to them. Aspects of this training module could address response on both a personal and professional level, including mandatory reporting protocols and how to tactfully share limits of confidentiality with someone prior to hearing a disclosure in a workplace setting.



More respondents indicated that they told “a friend of family member” in the aftermath of experiencing an assault, rather than “officially” reporting - which is an incredibly common reaction.



Training that covers positive, affirming responses to disclosures of sexual violence can help participants plan and practice responding in ways that affirm and uplift the survivor.

- *Reporting misbehavior:* While staff to elected officials were only responsible for 12 percent of all misconduct reported by respondents, overwhelmingly respondents knew how to file an official report against them – 46 percent responded “yes,” the highest of any surveyed occupation. Respondents who identified themselves as employees of the Legislature were also far more likely to indicate that they knew how to report misbehavior from the surveyed professions. While there is still work to do within these spheres, it’s clear that these more centralized, structured professions have had more success implementing baseline knowledge around reporting. While recognizing other, more decentralized professions might have less individual touchpoints with employees, leaders can work to find annual events where this type of training might be offered on an ongoing basis.



## **Education & Training**

**Training topics can holistically address the root causes of sexual violence.**

.....

Training can help address knowledge gaps around reporting misbehavior, responding to disclosures, and general information and dynamics about sexual violence. That said, even the best training will be for naught if it is not partnered with broader cultural change. Trainings focused on prevention and intervention must be complemented by clear systems and processes for reporting, investigation, and accountability.

## STRUCTURAL SUPPORT & RESOURCES

Survey responses revealed a need to establish and strengthen the basic human resources infrastructure in many of the surveyed professions. The decentralized nature of many of these professions exposes them to (1) a lack of official human resources professionals, and therefore (2) a system where decisions are allowed to be made on a 'case-by-case' basis, ranging from termination of employment to how many vacation days an employee gets.

Survey respondents indicated that a lack of structural HR departments is an issue at the local and county government levels as well as in the Legislature, where staffing decisions are often made at the discretion of the elected official for whom they work. Outside of the very serious issues of harassment and misconduct, this has broader implications for fair treatment in employment throughout the state. Pursuant to these findings, recommendations include:

### *Non-partisan reporting systems*

While respondents represented a broad array of occupations in N.J. politics, a common universal issue was a lack of centralized, independent reporting processes. In some cases, this has led to power brokers in the state and in individual counties devising their own "policies" for receiving and investigating complaints of sexual misconduct, which are often unwritten and can vary widely from case to case. This lack of formality has led to individuals with power creating the process as they go, sometimes scrambling to identify external experts to assist in the investigation and leaving complainants feeling uncertain of the process and mistrusting of the findings.

Ultimately, the lack of process has eroded a sense of trust and safety on the part of the Complainants. The Complainant has a reasonable right to expect their report to be taken seriously and with some level of uniformity throughout the state (meaning, in the case of county parties, a well-resourced county party shouldn't be able to create a more transparent and equitable process than another party with less financial resources). The creation of statewide, non-partisan reporting and investigation entities will act as a stopgap to prevent politics from impeding the reporting and investigation process.



Many respondents indicated that a lack of official human resources professionals led to decisions being made on a case-by-case basis, rather than implementing a standard response.



Statewide, non-partisan reporting systems can act as a stopgap to prevent political agendas from impeding investigations.

### *Adaptive response systems*

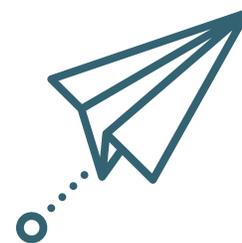
A bifurcated reporting / response system would allow the person who experienced harm to choose the type of outcome they would like to pursue, which can be a critical part of healing and wellness in the aftermath of victimization. In a report<sup>4</sup> to their state Legislature, the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault recommended forming two distinct complaint processes: an informal and a formal route. Based on the articulated needs from the survey, NJCASA feels this recommendation would meet an expressed need in N.J. as well. To best meet each person's unique needs, the response system should have a formal and informal complaint process, which the person who was harmed (or the 'Complainant') should be allowed to choose between without undue influence from others and/or the institution.

The informal complaint process would be used to resolve less severe, though equally serious, complaints, where the Complainant just wants the bad behavior to be put to rest. The informal process would focus on behavior modification and would be run on a single-investigator model. For a person who wants an apology, or who wants no one to ever experience the same harassment they experienced, this is a route that provides that outcome. A formal complaint process would be pursued when the Complainant wants more permanent actions as an outcome, such as demotion or loss of employment. It would appropriately separate the distinct roles of investigating, fact finding, recommending and administering discipline, recourse, and/or termination (if necessary).

### **CULTURE CHANGE & ACCOUNTABILITY**

When asked about accountability and repercussions for people who commit misconduct and cause harm, 24 percent of respondents indicated the desire to receive "an apology," and another 24 percent indicated "termination of employment" would be suitable. We believe this illustrates a common truth: when it comes to responding to sexual violence and assault, every survivor is going to want something different.

By working to create a culture of accountability within the N.J. political sphere, we can better respond to every survivor's unique needs while also creating lasting cultural change. To that end, recommendations include:



.....  
A bifurcated reporting system will allow for those who have experienced harassment to make decisions about outcomes that work best for them.

#### **STRUCTURAL CHANGE**

##### **Systems that meet the need**

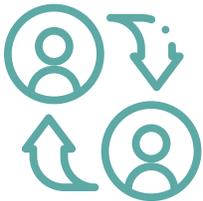
Respondents want a vast array of outcomes after an assault. Responsive systems meet that need.

- An *informal complaint system* can be used when the Complainant just want the behavior to *stop*.
- A *formal complaint system* would be used for more permanent outcomes, like termination or other official discipline.



Successful bystander intervention training provides opportunities for participants to roleplay and practice intervening.

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.....  
Large-scale, cultural change is the work of every, single one of us - and is the only way we will fully dismantle harassment and misogyny.

## IN CONCLUSION

Policies and formal processes for reporting and investigating sexual misconduct (when such policies and processes even exist) rely on black and white facts – clear, obvious, and observable behavior that can confirm wrong-doing. This report highlights the ways in which misogyny and harassment more frequently fly under the radar, detected mainly by those most greatly impacted – survivors. The hand low upon the back of a colleague. Bearing witness to the ways in which other victims who have come forward have been side-lined and silenced. The incredulous response by “good guys” in their private circles, who defend and excuse bad behavior by assuring that “he didn’t mean it like that.” We have a culture issue in N.J. politics – a power structure based on preserving transactional relationships to the detriment of true access and equity. As one respondent articulated, “Sexual harassment is a gateway to misogyny in lawmaking.” We have work to do, New Jersey! #smashthepatriarchy

### *Bystander intervention*

Survey results showed that though most respondents believed they would say something if they witnessed harassment (26 percent) few actually did speak up or intervene in the moment (6 percent). It can be part of human nature to avoid conflict or uncomfortable situations, coupled with the reality that more often than not people don’t necessarily know how to intervene appropriately or be helpful in these situations. Training on bystander intervention helps prepare individuals for how to respond when they witness misconduct and incorporates role playing activities for participants to practice new skills. But after a training is completed, the longer-term work begins, of modeling the behavior and creating a culture where people feel empowered to step in. It is worth noting that even the best training will be for naught if there is an tacit understanding that speaking up could be detrimental to one’s opportunities for advancement, or that there are certain people within the institution who are ‘untouchable’ in terms of consequences. Therefore, trainings focused prevention and intervention must be complemented by clear systems and processes for reporting, investigation, and accountability.

### *Rejection of harmful norms*

Our final recommendation is the hardest one – because it requires large-scale, cultural change. This is the work of every single one of us. The reality is that culture change is the only way we fully dismantle the systems that allow sexual harassment, violence, and rank misogyny to flourish. Enforcement of zero-tolerance policies, thoughtful focus on the character content of those in political leadership, and the expectation that anyone involved in the political arena has the right and responsibility to speak against harmful behaviors - these are some of the strategies that can begin to create a safer, more equitable environment for everyone involved in politics.

**We can create safer, more  
equitable environments**



**for everyone involved in politics.**

# citations

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, G.R., Offen, L., & Waller, G. (1997). *See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil: Why do relatively few male victims of childhood sexual abuse receive help for abuse-related issues in adulthood?* *Clinical Psychology Review*, 17, 69-88.

<sup>2</sup> Ahrens CE, Campbell R, Ternier-Thames NK, Wasco SM, Sefl T. *Deciding whom to tell: Expectations and outcomes of rape survivors' first disclosures.* *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. 2007;31:38-49  
"38% of the survivors in Ahrens and colleagues' study of rape victims first disclosed to a friend, whereas 6% first disclosed to the police."

<sup>3</sup> Fisher BS, Daigle LE, Cullen FT, Turner MG. *Reporting sexual victimization to the police and others: Results from a national-level study of college women.* *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. 2003;30:6-38.  
"The analysis revealed that although few incidents—including rapes—are reported to the police and/or to campus authorities, a high proportion are disclosed to someone else (mainly to friends)."

<sup>4</sup> Rita ER, Volmer J, Bowman SJ, et al. (2018). *General Assembly 2.0: A transformational approach to legislative workplace culture.* Investigations Law Group, LLC.: Denver, CO.

*“As a result of this survey, it has occurred to me that I have no idea how to properly report such behavior. I will make a point of determining that information at my earliest opportunity.”*

*“Microaggressions are a constant undercurrent. Calling them out in the moment is not always possible or is perceived as overreacting. So they go unchecked and the culture remains toxic for women and anyone else who doesn’t identify as ‘bro.’”*

*“It’s all about avoiding lawsuits [rather] than preventing a culture that tolerates the sexual harassment of women. Reporting is pointless as the current procedures just ensures a target is placed on the women that do report it. Witnessed several men that had been investigated for sexual harassment be promoted to management positions, creating a hopeless position for women.”*

*“If I’m brutally honest, I’d probably not report it. I have zero faith that the outcome would be positive. It never is. Even if everyone feigns support for the victim, they’re now considered ‘difficult.’ It’s still much easier to sweep it under the rug. I’m just being honest.”*

*“Misogyny is prevalent everywhere in N.J. politics, its discouraging that as a young staffer I already know so many stories about young women who have been touched, harassed, belittled, and raped and nothing is ever done about it.”*

*“Despite reporting incidents which were addressed by the appropriate authority, I was shocked by retaliation by colleagues, especially women.”*

*“A male activist approached me at a fundraiser, pointed at a female volunteer, and said, ‘Look at that ass on her. If only I were a younger man.’ These types of interactions are typical, not the exception to the rule.”*

*- A sample of open-ended survey responses*



# njcoalition

against sexual assault

**Visit us online at: [njcasa.org](http://njcasa.org)**

*If you or someone you know needs support, New Jersey's statewide, confidential sexual violence hotline is available:  
800 - 601 - 7200.*