



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## NEW YORK STATE SENATORS UNVEIL “Employees in the Workforce Protections Package ”

SUSAN SERINO March 18, 2021

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The New York State Senate Republican Women’s Caucus -- Pam Helming, Daphne Jordan, Patty Ritchie, Sue Serino and Alexis Weik -- today announced the “Employees in the Workforce Protections Package,” a comprehensive package of proposals to address sexual harassment in the workplace and specifically state government offices.

The allegations against the Cuomo Administration are a nightmarish combination of sexual abuse, assault, intimidation, bullying, retribution, and toxic work relationships in which power goes completely unchecked. No elected officials -- least of all the most powerful in the state -- should operate in this manner.

The Senate Republican Women's Caucus and entire Republican Conference vow to push forward the "Employees in the Workforce Protections Package" to enact long overdue reforms for the state workforce, in an effort to prevent terrible acts like these from ever taking place again.

The "Employees in the Workforce Protections Package" includes proposals to:

- Allow employees to bring a complaint with regard to an allegation of sexual harassment in employment within one year of their employment termination with such employer;
- Establish a truly independent commission aimed at increasing transparency and more effectively combating sexual harassment in state government; expressly requires commission members to have relevant experience in handling these particular kinds of cases in order to restore integrity and credibility to the process. Specifically, the membership would include attorneys with actual experience in the establishment of institutional policies, sexual harassment claims, sex crimes, and reporting requirements;
- Protect employees from retaliatory actions by employer or co-employees by criminalizing the use of confidential employee personnel files for the purposes of harassment, intimidation or embarrassment; and
- Require statewide office holders and members of the state legislature sign a certificate under penalty of perjury attesting to the individual's completion of their sexual harassment training program. The signed certificates shall be posted on the Senate and Assembly websites within 30 days of completion.

“Sexual harassment anywhere, by anyone, must not be tolerated. I believe we, as state legislators and employees, have a responsibility to protect New York state government workers from harassment and intimidation. We also must ensure the integrity of the state’s sexual harassment training program. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, period,” said Senator Pam Helming.

“Our ‘Employees in the Workforce Protections Package’ will reinforce the essential, non-partisan message that sexual harassment, bullying, intimidation, and toxic workplaces are completely unacceptable. These necessary reforms are intended to prevent the very behaviors that Governor Cuomo is being accused of by seven women, the majority of whom are current or former staffers in his administration as these behaviors and allegations are investigated by the State Attorney General. It’s important that every person know they are valued, they are respected, and they will never have to endure sexual harassment or a hostile work environment like the shocking and disturbing allegations we’ve heard and read about in recent weeks,” said Senator Daphne Jordan.

“Every workplace should be free from harassment and toxicity—and state government offices are no different. The workplace should be a space where people thrive, not a place where they live in fear of harassment and abusive behavior. These reforms will help create safer workplaces for all and provide employees with the protections they deserve,” said Senator Patty Ritchie.

“The disturbing allegations made against the Governor—the highest ranking official in state government—make it clear that we must do more to put an immediate and final end to the culture of corruption and secrecy that only emboldens bad actors. We have a duty to empower employees by ensuring they have access to a process they can actually trust to

report misconduct and hold perpetrators accountable. A truly independent commission to investigate claims of sexual harassment is needed now, more than ever, and I urge my colleagues in the Legislature to help make state government safer for everyone by setting politics aside to advance these critical changes,” said Senator Sue Serino.

“Every employee should expect to work in an environment free from harassment, discrimination, and intimidation. It is simply inexcusable for anyone to be subject to inappropriate behavior in the workplace. While the State has taken steps to address harassment in the workplace, clearly more must be done. This ‘Employees in the Workforce Protections Package’ advanced by the Senate Republican Conference will help close loopholes, protect victims, and hold those who engage in inappropriate behavior accountable,” said Senator Alexis Weik.

By bringing this legislative package to the floor and signing it into law, Albany would be sending a message in recognition of the brave survivors who have come forward and shared their stories of harassment. More than just legislative proposals, these proposals lay the foundation towards a state government of justice and propriety, and their adoption would demonstrate that New York State government has no tolerance for harassment in the workplace.

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