



Sexual Harassment Prevention & Compliance Report

Report to the Joint Standing Committee on Labor
Pursuant to Resolve 2025, chapter 90

Maine Department of Labor
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1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment remains a pervasive and deeply consequential barrier to workplace safety, dignity, and economic opportunity in Maine. For too many workers—especially women in male-dominated industries, young workers, LGBTQ+ workers, New Mainers, workers in the service and tourism industries, and individuals employed in isolated settings—sexual harassment is a frequent hazard of work. Research also shows that risk factors for sexual harassment include:

- precarious contracts and employment insecurity,
- low pay and poor conditions of work,
- ineffective workplace policies and complex or non-existent complaint processes,
- lack of prevention programs,
- providing direct services to customers and/or clients as a part of the job, such as nurses or service industries, and
- the absence of policies, awareness or supports to address domestic/interpersonal violence.

Sexual harassment is an ongoing, sometimes normalized part of workplace culture that undermines workers' ability to participate fully and equally in the workforce and may cause long-term negative consequences to their health and safety and that of their workplaces.

Yet only a fraction of the people affected by these experiences ever make a formal complaint with the Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) or file a workers' compensation claim. Most workers experiencing harassment do not report, internally or externally, the abuse they are experiencing. Instead, they endure, minimize, or quietly exit their jobs, often sacrificing wages, career advancement, training opportunities, and professional networks.¹

This disconnect—between the prevalence of sexual harassment and the limited number of formal complaints—highlights a fundamental reality that shapes this report: sexual harassment is far broader, more complex, and more widespread than the most severe or legally actionable cases alone can capture.

Workers and advocates consistently describe sexual harassment as existing along a continuum of behaviors, ranging from one-time subtle gender-based comments to unwanted attention to overt coercion or retaliation. “Lower-level” but persistent behaviors often accumulate over time and create hostile or intimidating work environments, often serving as early warning signs of more severe harm. Understanding this continuum is essential for any effective prevention strategy.²

¹U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace* (2016), finding that the majority of individuals who experience workplace harassment do not file a formal complaint.

<https://www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace>

² U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace* (2016); National Women's Law Center, *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace*.

Maine’s legal framework acknowledges this breadth. Under the Maine Human Rights Act, sexual harassment includes unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that affects employment conditions or creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment. But legal definitions alone cannot capture the lived reality of behaviors and workplace norms that silence workers and enable harassment to persist. Anyone can experience sexual harassment; it is not based on attraction to the victim – it is about taking power from the victim.

The Legislature recognized that preventing harassment requires more than policy language or annual trainings. It requires meaningful culture change, clear expectations, and accessible systems that workers trust. This report therefore focuses on both compliance with existing requirements and opportunities to strengthen prevention strategies that stop harassment before it occurs.

Maine’s system for addressing sexual harassment is bifurcated, with the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) responsible for compliance and the Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) responsible for enforcement. This structure creates important strengths but also significant gaps, particularly around data collection, early intervention, and worker support. Resolve 2025, Chapter 90 seeks to illuminate these gaps, assess compliance, and identify opportunities to improve employer practices and statewide coordination.

The sections that follow outline the statutory framework, the enforcement landscape, available data, sector-specific concerns, ongoing initiatives, and recommendations for strengthening Maine’s approach to preventing workplace sexual harassment.

2. BACKGROUND & LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

2.1 Purpose and Scope of 2025 Resolve, Chapter 90

In 2025, the Legislature enacted LD 1554, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Report on Sexual Harassment*, responding to ongoing concerns about workplace sexual harassment and inconsistent compliance with existing prevention requirements. While Maine has long required employers to maintain written sexual harassment policies, deliver annual training, and inform workers of their rights, reports from stakeholders and limitations in available data made clear that compliance and prevention remain uneven across industries.³ Increasingly, these concerns have been raised not only as civil rights issues, but as matters affecting worker safety, health, and retention.

www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace
nwlc.org/resource/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/

³ Maine Legislature, LD 1554 (132nd Legislature), *Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Report on Sexual Harassment*.

<https://legislature.maine.gov/billtracker/#Paper/1554?legislature=132>

Resolve 2025, Chapter 90 directed the MDOL to assess employer compliance with statutory obligations, summarize available data on workplace sexual harassment, and identify strategies—including potential legislation—to strengthen prevention efforts statewide. This mandate reflects a broader statewide and national shift toward recognizing sexual harassment not only as a violation of civil rights, but also as a workplace safety issue that can undermine the occupational safety and health, including physical and psychological wellbeing, of workers; contribute to hazardous working conditions, and increase the risk of injury, stress-related harm, and workforce attrition.^{4 5}

Under Title 26, Chapter 7, Subchapter 4-B, employers are required to maintain a written sexual harassment policy, provide written notice to employees, display required posters, complete new-hire compliance checklists, and conduct annual training for employees and supervisors. These requirements are intended to promote awareness and create clear expectations for workplace conduct, and to serve as preventive measures that reduce the likelihood of harm before it occurs. MDOL ensures that employers meet these requirements through focused inspections of workplaces and in response to worker complaints.

MHRC has jurisdiction over individual complaints, pursuant to the Maine Human Rights Act. MHRC investigates allegations of discrimination and harassment, determines whether reasonable grounds exist, facilitates conciliation, and issues right-to-sue letters. The Commission's role is reactive and complaint-driven, while the Department of Labor's role is preventative and compliance-focused, consistent with its broader mission to promote safe and healthy working conditions.

It is important to understand both the strengths and limitations of the current system. While Maine has clear legal standards and an established enforcement mechanism, no single entity is responsible for collecting comprehensive information on workplace harassment or for intervening early when workplace culture issues pose risks to worker safety and wellbeing. Resolve 2025, Chapter 90 was enacted in part to address these gaps by assessing compliance and identifying opportunities to strengthen prevention as a component of workplace safety.

⁴ LD 1554, §1 (reporting requirements and authorization to make recommendations).
https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/display_ps.asp?ld=1554&PID=1456&snum=132

⁵ International Labour Organization, *Convention No. 190: Violence and Harassment* (2019), recognizing violence and harassment as occupational safety and health concerns.
www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:3999810

2.2 Employer Obligations Under Title 26⁶ and Enforcement Under the Maine Human Rights Act⁷

Under Title 26, Chapter 7, Subchapter 4-B, Maine employers are required to maintain a written sexual harassment policy, provide written notice to new employees, display a poster summarizing worker rights, conduct annual training for employees and supervisors, and retain training records for three years. MDOL provides, and the Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) posts, a compliance checklist to assist employers in meeting these statutory requirements. These provisions are intended to ensure that workers understand what constitutes sexual harassment, know how to report it, and are aware of their protected rights.

Enforcement of sexual harassment complaints occurs under the Maine Human Rights Act (Title 5) and is administered by MHRC, which conducts intake, investigations, findings, conciliation, and public-interest litigation. MDOL's role is preventative and compliance-focused, while MHRC's role is reactive and case-specific.

Because of this bifurcated structure, no single agency maintains a comprehensive dataset on workplace harassment. MDOL does not track complaints, and MHRC's complaint data reflects only those incidents that are formally reported. The Legislature acknowledged these structural gaps in the resolve and directed further examination of employer compliance and prevention tools.

2.3 Broader Workforce Equity and Gender-Based Violence Initiatives

Resolve 2025, Chapter 90 aligns with the Governor's Executive Order on Women in Construction, the Maine Apprenticeship Program's equity efforts, and ongoing collaboration with MECASA, SAPARS, and the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau.⁸⁹¹⁰¹¹ These efforts all recognize that recruiting women into high-wage sectors is insufficient without meaningful interventions to ensure their safety and retention.

⁶ Maine Revised Statutes, Title 26, Chapter 7, Subchapter 4-B (Sexual Harassment Prevention Requirements). legislature.maine.gov/statutes/26/title26sec807.html

⁷ Maine Human Rights Act, 5 M.R.S. §§ 4551–4634. www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/5/title5ch337sec0.html

⁸ Executive Order on Women in Construction — Governor Mills www.maine.gov/governor/mills/official_documents/executive-orders/2024-05-executive-order-7-order-regarding-women-construction

⁹ Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) www.mecasa.org

¹⁰ Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services www.sapars.org

¹¹ U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau www.dol.gov/agencies/wb

3. ENFORCEMENT LANDSCAPE IN MAINE

The Maine Department of Labor and the MHRC play complementary but distinct roles in addressing workplace sexual harassment. MDOL's authority is limited to ensuring compliance with statutory notice and training requirements. The Department does not investigate or adjudicate complaints of sexual harassment.¹²

Through employer outreach, technical assistance, SafetyWorks! consultations, and focused inspections, MDOL gains insight into common challenges faced by employers, including uncertainty about training requirements, limited human resources capacity, and difficulty responding appropriately to interpersonal workplace issues.¹³ These interactions, while informative, do not generate formal data on sexual harassment incidents.

MHRC is the primary enforcement body for sexual harassment claims under the Maine Human Rights Act. According to MHRC's most recent annual report, employment-related complaints account for the majority of its caseload, and sex discrimination remains among the most frequently cited bases.¹⁴ While this data shows that harassment remains an issue, it reflects only those incidents that workers felt safe enough to report to the MHRC.

Stakeholder input and data from US DOL consistently highlighted barriers to reporting, including fear of retaliation, long investigation timelines, and the emotional and economic costs of pursuing a complaint. These factors contribute to substantial underreporting and underscore the importance of strengthening prevention efforts at the employer level.

MDOL's Compliance Role

MDOL's authority under Title 26 is focused on compliance with notice and training requirements. State law requires that all employers have a written policy and provide workers with clear notice of their rights; employers with 15 or more employees must also provide annual training on sexual harassment.¹⁵ MDOL may respond to employer inquiries, conduct outreach, and offer technical assistance, but it does not investigate worker complaints of sexual harassment or determine whether unlawful conduct occurred.

¹² Maine Revised Statutes, Title 26 (Department of Labor compliance authority) and Title 5 (Maine Human Rights Act enforcement authority).

www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/26/title26ch7sub4-B.html
www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/5/title5ch337.html

¹³ MDOL SafetyWorks! consultation page <https://www.safetyworksmaine.com/consultations/index.shtml>

¹⁴ MHRC 2025 Annual Report <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/sites/maine.gov/mhrc/files/inline-files/MHRC%20FY25%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

¹⁵ 26 MRS §807 — Discrimination <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/statutes/26/title26sec807.html>

Insights from SafetyWorks! consultations and general employer outreach indicate that many businesses—particularly small employers—struggle to interpret requirements, implement effective trainings, or create trusted reporting systems. These insights are anecdotal and confidential, underscoring the absence of a centralized system for gathering comprehensive data on harassment.

MHRC’s Enforcement Role

MHRC is the state’s civil rights enforcement agency. It conducts intake, drafts formal complaints, notifies employers, investigates allegations, issues findings of reasonable or no reasonable grounds, facilitates conciliation, and provides right-to-sue letters. MHRC can also litigate cases in the public interest.¹⁶

FY25 data from MHRC shows 690 new complaints, with 71% related to employment. Sex discrimination—including sexual harassment—remains one of the top bases for complaints.¹⁷ But MHRC’s caseload reflects only those incidents that workers feel safe enough to formalize through the complaint process. Long investigation timelines, emotional burden, fears of retaliation, and workplace power dynamics can discourage reporting, especially among workers facing harassment from supervisors or coworkers in tight-knit industries.

Gaps Created by Divided Roles

This bifurcation leaves several gaps. There is no centralized repository for reports of sexual harassment, no mandated reporting mechanism for employers, and no comprehensive system for understanding sector-specific trends. Workers must navigate complex decisions about whether to report internally, seek advocacy support, or pursue an MHRC complaint. Many choose not to report at all due to fear of retaliation, mistrust of internal processes, or concern that the MHRC process is too lengthy.

Understanding these gaps is critical because they shape the recommendations needed to strengthen prevention and improve workplace safety.

¹⁶ Maine Human Rights Commission <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/>

¹⁷ MHRC 2025 Annual Report <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/sites/maine.gov/mhrc/files/inline-files/MHRC%20FY25%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

4. EXISTING DATA LANDSCAPE

Available data provides only a partial picture of workplace sexual harassment in Maine. Workers' compensation claims, MHRC complaints, and information shared by advocacy organizations each offer insight into specific aspects of the problem, but none capture its full scope.

Three primary sources provide insight: workers' compensation claim data, MHRC complaints, and disclosures made to service providers such as SAPARS and MECASA.

4.1 Workers' Compensation Data

Workers' compensation claims do not capture sexual harassment directly, but they do record injuries related to workplace violence and stress. Data reviewed for this report shows that women file approximately three times as many violence-related claims and twice as many stress-related claims as men.¹⁸ Although not definitive, these disparities suggest that women experience harmful workplace conditions at disproportionately high rates.

National data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics similarly show that women account for a disproportionate share of nonfatal workplace violence injuries requiring days away from work.¹⁹

These claims are spread across a range of industries, not solely those traditionally considered high-risk. However, this dataset is limited because many forms of harassment do not produce a compensable injury and therefore never appear in workers' compensation systems. Stress-related claims may reflect a wide range of workplace experiences, only some of which relate to harassment.²⁰

¹⁸ Internal MDOL Analysis of Maine Workers' Compensation Claims:

Internal analysis of Maine Workers' Compensation Board First Reports of Occupational Injury or Disease conducted by the Maine Department of Labor for purposes of this report. (*Not publicly available.*)

¹⁹ US DOL BLS National Workplace Violence Injury Data: Women accounted for approximately 72.5 % of nonfatal workplace violence injuries requiring days away from work in 2021–2022.

<https://www.bls.gov/iif/factsheets/workplace-violence-2021-2022.htm>

²⁰ Limitations of workers' Compensation Data: Workers' compensation systems capture only injuries meeting statutory compensability thresholds; many psychosocial harms and experiences that do not result in medical treatment or lost time are not captured.

4.2 Maine Human Rights Commission Complaint Data

MHRC data reflects only those incidents that workers formally report under the Maine Human Rights Act.²¹ In FY25, MHRC received 690 complaints, with the majority involving employment. Sex discrimination remains one of the most frequently cited bases for filing.²²

While MHRC's caseload shows that harassment remains an issue in Maine workplaces, it also reflects only a fraction of actual experiences. Workers often hesitate to report due to lengthy investigation timelines, fear of retaliation, or skepticism that the process will result in meaningful change.²³ As a result, MHRC's data provides important insights into reported harassment but cannot be used to estimate prevalence.

4.3 Insights from Service Providers

Advocacy organizations consistently report that many workers seek support confidentially, without filing internal or external complaints.²⁴ These workers describe a wide range of experiences, from subtle harassment to severe misconduct, often involving power disparities or workplace cultures that normalize gender-based hostility.²⁵

Because these conversations are confidential and not recorded in any formal dataset, they offer critical qualitative insight but do not contribute to statewide quantitative data.²⁶

4.4 The Underreporting Gap and Data Limitations

National research indicates that a significant share of workplace harassment is never formally reported, and stakeholder feedback in Maine echoed this pattern. Workers often fear retaliation,

²¹ Maine Human Rights Act <https://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/5/title5ch337sec0.html>

²² MHRC 2025 Annual Report <https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/sites/maine.gov/mhrc/files/inline-files/MHRC%20FY25%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

²³ EEOC – Sexual Harassment in Our Nation's Workplaces Reporting <https://www.eeoc.gov/data/sexual-harassment-our-nations-workplaces>

²⁴ EEOC - Underreporting and Confidential Support Use: https://www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace#_Toc453686298

²⁵ EEOC - Range of Harassment Experienced and Power Dynamics: <https://www.eeoc.gov/sexual-harassment>

²⁶ Qualitative vs. Quantitative Data Limitations: Researchers and expert bodies note that administrative data sources (e.g., formal complaints, employer reports, workers' compensation) capture only a fraction of harassment experiences, and that qualitative accounts and survey data are essential for understanding the lived experience, prevalence, and context of gender-based harassment. See the EEOC Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace and other research on the limitations of complaint-based data. <https://www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace>

worry about job security, or believe reporting will not lead to meaningful change. Many workers—particularly women in male-dominated industries and individuals in rural or small workplaces—described feeling that reporting could carry personal, social, or economic risks.²⁷²⁸²⁹

As a result, no existing dataset captures the full scope of workplace sexual harassment. Current data systems do not systematically capture:

- Internal complaints made to employers
- Low-level or cultural harassment
- Experiences of workers who leave jobs due to harassment
- Unreported incidents handled informally
- Sector-specific trends or patterns

Maine lacks a comprehensive system for understanding the prevalence, dynamics, and sector-specific patterns of workplace sexual harassment. These gaps limit the state’s ability to evaluate training effectiveness, identify high-risk industries, and develop targeted prevention strategies. Strengthening data collection and enhancing reporting pathways are therefore essential components of any comprehensive approach to preventing workplace sexual harassment.³⁰

5. SECTOR AND COMMUNITY SPECIFIC ISSUES

Although sexual harassment occurs in every industry and workplace setting, the risk, prevalence, reporting patterns, and consequences vary significantly across sectors. Stakeholder conversations, workers’ compensation information, MHRC complaint trends, and the lived

²⁷ HR Acuity — Why Employees Don’t Report Workplace Mistreatment.

HR research finds that many employees do not report workplace misconduct due to fear of retaliation and lack of confidence that concerns will be taken seriously. <https://www.hracity.com/blog/why-employees-dont-report-workplace-mistreatment/>

²⁸ People Management Survey (UK) — Half of employees do not report sexual harassment.

A business-focused survey found that approximately half of employees who experienced or witnessed workplace sexual harassment did not report it, often due to fear of retaliation or lack of trust in leadership. <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1866611/half-employees-not-report-workplace-sexual-harassment-survey-finds-%E2%80%9393-businesses-encourage-speaking-up>

²⁹ WorkRise Network — Sexual harassment underreported when economic security is weak.

Labor-market research shows that workers are less likely to report harassment in contexts where economic security is limited, underscoring the role of job-security concerns and power dynamics in underreporting. <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

³⁰ NIH / National Library of Medicine — Underreporting of workplace violence incidents.

Studies of workplace violence and misconduct reporting behavior find that formal reporting systems capture only a small share of harmful workplace experiences, demonstrating the limits of administrative datasets for estimating true prevalence. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5006066/>

experience of workers—particularly women in male-dominated industries—demonstrate that workplace structures, certain job characteristics and sector dynamics increase vulnerability. These sector-specific conditions also influence whether workers feel safe reporting harassment and whether employers are equipped to respond effectively.³¹³²

Other sectors, including health care, education, hospitality, and service industries, present different but related challenges. These workplaces often involve customer or client interaction, irregular schedules, and hierarchical structures that can complicate reporting and response.³³³⁴ Workers in rural or small workplaces may face additional barriers due to limited anonymity and social interconnectedness.³⁵

The following subsections describe the most salient, recurring challenges identified across stakeholder discussions, with particular emphasis on the construction and trades sectors, where concerns were raised repeatedly and with considerable urgency.

5.1 Construction and the Skilled Trades

Stakeholders emphasized that construction and the skilled trades present some of the most challenging environments for preventing sexual harassment and ensuring worker safety. While women represent a very small share of the construction workforce, they disproportionately experience harassment, intimidation, and exclusion. This disparity does not appear in formal data systems—but it emerges consistently in worker testimony and advocacy reports.³⁶³⁷

³¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Workplace Violence, 2021–2022 (industry sector differences; health care and social assistance accounts for a large share of nonfatal workplace violence cases).

<https://www.bls.gov/iif/factsheets/workplace-violence-2021-2022.htm>

³² National Safety Council (NSC). Injury Facts – Assault at Work

<https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/safety-topics/assault/data-details/>

³³ Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

<https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/inclusion-diversity/preventing-sexual-harassment-workplace>

³⁴ EEOC. Sexual Harassment in Our Nation’s Workplaces

<https://www.eeoc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/Sexual%20Harassment%20Awareness%20Month%202022%20Data%20Highlight.pdf>

³⁵ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

³⁶ NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) — Women’s Experiences and Advancement in Construction (2025 report, includes findings related to harassment/bullying/discrimination and policy implementation). https://www.nccer.org/media/2025/04/NCCER_Women-in-Construction_Report-Final-04232025.pdf NCCER

³⁷ EEOC (PDF) — “Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Construction Industry.”

https://www.eeoc.gov/sites/default/files/2024-06/Construction%20Harassment%20Promising%20Practices_508.pdf EEOC

A. Workplace Culture and Gender Isolation

Construction crews often operate within small, tight-knit teams where a woman may be alone or one of very few women on a worksite. Worksites may include parking areas, temporary or remote field facilities (such as portable sanitation units), and work-related transportation to and from job locations, and may involve workers from multiple employers and uncertainty regarding responsibility for ensuring that the workplace is safe. This gender isolation heightens risk in multiple ways. Workers described environments where sexually explicit jokes, comments about bodies, and exclusionary behavior are normalized and persistent. Because the culture of many crews is shaped by long-standing interpersonal relationships, women and gender-diverse workers may feel they are entering a pre-existing social hierarchy not designed for them.

In these settings, sexual harassment is often framed as “just joking around,” leaving workers uncertain whether behavior meets the threshold for a complaint or whether speaking up will jeopardize their belonging or advancement. When inappropriate behavior is normalized, workers may internalize that harassment is simply part of the job.³⁸

B. Power Dynamics and Gatekeeping

In the trades, access to hours, job assignments, overtime, and apprenticeship opportunities often depends on the discretion of supervisors, foremen, or journey-level workers. Workers described these individuals as “gatekeepers,” whose opinions can determine whether a worker progresses in the trade or is selected for desirable projects.³⁹⁴⁰

These power dynamics make reporting harassment extremely risky. Workers repeatedly stated that they feared filing a complaint would lead to fewer hours, poor evaluations, or reassignment to less desirable or more dangerous tasks. Even when formal retaliation is prohibited, informal retaliation—being “iced out,” socially ostracized, or subjected to increased scrutiny—is easy to carry out and difficult to prove. As a result, many workers feel it is safer to endure harassment than to speak up.⁴¹

³⁸ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners) — Sexual harassment is underreported when economic security/safety net is weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

³⁹ NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) — Women’s Experiences and Advancement in Construction (2025 report, includes findings related to harassment/bullying/discrimination and policy implementation). https://www.nccer.org/media/2025/04/NCCER_Women-in-Construction_Report-Final-04232025.pdf NCCER

⁴⁰ EEOC (PDF) — “Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Construction Industry.” https://www.eeoc.gov/sites/default/files/2024-06/Construction%20Harassment%20Promising%20Practices_508.pdf EEOC

⁴¹ HR Acuity — Why employees don’t report mistreatment (fear, trust, perceived futility). <https://www.hracity.com/blog/why-employees-dont-report-workplace-mistreatment/>

C. Lack of Trusted Reporting Channels

Small contractors and subcontractors may lack human resources staff. Many worksites involve multiple employers, creating confusion over who is responsible for receiving and responding to complaints. Workers often move between job sites and crews, making it difficult to know to whom to report, whether the report will remain confidential, or whether the response will be consistent.⁴²

Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that workers do not trust that their reports will be taken seriously or handled discreetly. Workers described instances where complaints led to increased hostility rather than resolution, reinforcing the perception that reporting is unsafe.⁴³

D. Crew Dynamics and “Fit In or Get Out” Pressures

Workers described strong pressures to “fit in,” maintain crew cohesion, and avoid being labeled as difficult or disruptive. In male-dominated worksites, women expressed concern that asserting boundaries or reporting harassment could brand them as “overly sensitive,” making it harder to access the same opportunities for work, advancement, and job security as their male counterparts.

Crew culture can also involve shared housing during long projects, travel to remote sites, and informal socializing after work—contexts that can increase risk and blur professional boundaries. Workers noted that harassment in these settings may feel especially unsafe because it occurs outside the formal structure of the worksite, yet remains embedded within workplace power dynamics and employment relationships. These dynamics reflect what the International Labour Organization describes as the “world of work”—a framework that recognizes that violence and harassment can occur not only at formal worksites, but also in work-related travel, employer-provided housing, and work-connected social settings where workplace power relationships remain active.^{44,45}

⁴² EEOC (PDF) — “Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Construction Industry.”

https://www.eeoc.gov/sites/default/files/2024-06/Construction%20Harassment%20Promising%20Practices_508.pdf EEOC

⁴³ HR Acuity — Why employees don’t report mistreatment (fear, trust, perceived futility).

<https://www.hracity.com/blog/why-employees-dont-report-workplace-mistreatment/>

⁴⁴ ILO — Violence and harassment in the world of work: <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/violence-and-harassment-world-work>

⁴⁵ ITUC mini guide to C190/R206 (PDF) — specific examples of “world of work” coverage: https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/c190_mini_guide_en.pdf

E. Underreporting and Silent Attrition

Advocates and workforce partners described a consistent pattern: women leaving the trades quietly rather than filing complaints. This “silent attrition” erodes the effectiveness of workforce development initiatives and undermines recruitment efforts.⁴⁶⁴⁷

Workers indicated they often leave because:

- harassment becomes unbearable,
- they see no viable reporting pathway,
- retaliation feels inevitable, or
- the cumulative climate becomes too hostile to endure.

The absence of reports does not equate to an absence of harm. In construction, the lack of complaints can often be evidence of fear, normalization of harassment, or resignation.

5.2 Health Care, Education, Hospitality, and Service Industries

Although much stakeholder attention centered on construction and the trades, concerns also emerged across health care, education, hospitality, and service industries. These sectors employ high percentages of women and frequently involve emotionally demanding work, irregular schedules, or customer-facing roles, which can introduce unique risks.

Professions that involve providing direct services or care to customers or clients have increased risks for sexual harassment. These industries have unique challenges in addressing it because most model workplace policies contemplate sexual harassment by supervisors or coworkers - not customers.⁴⁸

Preventing sexual harassment in these settings is possible through active engagement of workers who can describe the scope and incidents of sexual harassment they are experiencing as well as the solution. This is demonstrated by the HandsOff PantsOn campaign⁴⁹ in Chicago. This campaign led to the adoption of legislation in Chicago and many other states mandating that all staff in hotels wear panic buttons that they can press if they are unsafe and security will come to where they are.

⁴⁶ NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) — Women’s Experiences and Advancement in Construction: https://www.nccer.org/media/2025/04/NCCER_Women-in-Construction_Report-Final-04232025.pdf NCCER

⁴⁷ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

⁴⁸ NIOSH/CDC — About Workplace Violence: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violence/about/index.html>

⁴⁹ www.handsoffpantson.org

This has led to less sexual harassment of hotel staff in many workplaces across the country and increased productivity.⁵⁰⁵¹

A. Emotional Labor and Gendered Expectations

In care-oriented professions—such as health care, social services, and education—workers often feel pressured to maintain composure, de-escalate conflict, and absorb emotionally charged situations. Because these roles require empathy, workers may feel obligated to “brush off” inappropriate behavior.

These gendered expectations make it harder for workers to identify mistreatment as harassment or to prioritize their own safety.

Workers described experiencing harassment from:

- coworkers,
- supervisors,
- students,
- patients,
- clients, and
- occasionally families or community members.

B. Customer and Client Harassment

Workers in hospitality, retail, and service roles frequently encounter harassment from customers or clients. These incidents may not be clearly addressed in employer policies or training. Workers reported feeling unsupported when customer misconduct is treated as unavoidable or dismissed because the customer is viewed as “always right.”⁵²⁵³

C. Shift Work, Stress, and Burnout

Irregular hours, overnight shifts, high turnover, and staffing shortages can all contribute to environments where harassment goes unchecked. Workers may feel their supervisors are too

⁵⁰ UNITE HERE Local 1 — Hands Off Pants On campaign page: <https://www.unitehere1.org/hopo/>

⁵¹ Chicago ordinance coverage: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hands-off-pants-on-law-aims-to-make-hotel-work-safer/>

⁵² NIOSH/CDC — About Workplace Violence: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violence/about/index.html>

⁵³ HandsOff PantsOn campaign — ordinance education page: <https://www.handsoffpantson.org/protecting-and-respecting-women/>

overwhelmed to respond or that addressing harassment would create additional conflict in an already strained environment.⁵⁴

D. Fear of Retaliation in Hierarchical Systems

In health care and education, formal hierarchies can make reporting feel especially risky. Workers may fear repercussions to their professional standing, schedule, or long-term advancement. In settings with union representation, workers may have clearer pathways but still face social pressures that discourage reporting.⁵⁵⁵⁶

5.3 Rural and Small Workplaces

Small businesses, family-owned operations, and rural workplaces present distinct challenges. Workers described feeling that reporting misconduct in close-knit communities could lead to social fallout beyond the workplace—impacting reputations, family relationships, or future job prospects.⁵⁷⁵⁸ Isolation—both geographic and social—magnifies these concerns.⁵⁹

Many small employers lack formal policies or training beyond minimum statutory requirements. Workers in these settings indicated they often do not know who to report to or worry that the person they must report to is also the person responsible for the misconduct.

⁵⁴ BLS — Workplace violence (2021–2022) : <https://www.bls.gov/iif/factsheets/workplace-violence-2021-2022.htm>

⁵⁵ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

⁵⁶ HR Acuity — Why employees don't report mistreatment (fear, trust, perceived futility). <https://www.hracuity.com/blog/why-employees-dont-report-workplace-mistreatment/>

⁵⁷ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

⁵⁸ HR Acuity — Why employees don't report mistreatment (fear, trust, perceived futility). <https://www.hracuity.com/blog/why-employees-dont-report-workplace-mistreatment/>

⁵⁹ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

5.4 Low-Wage and Precarious Work

Workers in low-wage or precarious jobs—temporary, seasonal, part-time, or gig-based roles—are especially vulnerable. They may lack job security, financial stability, or alternative employment options, making the risks of reporting harassment feel insurmountable.⁶⁰

In addition to previously discussed risk factors for sexual harassment, these workers also described:

- limited access to training,
- high turnover environments,
- inconsistent supervision, and
- unclear reporting expectations.^{61 62}

Workers in these jobs may also juggle multiple employers or staffing agencies, complicating responsibility for prevention and response.⁶³

5.5 New Mainers and Workers with Language or Cultural Barriers

Stakeholders noted that New Mainers and workers with limited English proficiency often face compounded vulnerabilities. These workers may be unfamiliar with U.S. workplace laws or uncertain about the consequences of reporting misconduct. Language barriers may make it difficult to understand training content or to seek support. Workers from cultures with different norms surrounding hierarchy or gender may feel additional pressure to remain silent.^{64 65 66}

⁶⁰ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

⁶¹ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

⁶² HR Acuity — Why employees don't report mistreatment (fear, trust, perceived futility). <https://www.hracity.com/blog/why-employees-dont-report-workplace-mistreatment/>

⁶³ EEOC (PDF) — “Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment in the Construction Industry.” https://www.eeoc.gov/sites/default/files/2024-06/Construction%20Harassment%20Promising%20Practices_508.pdf EEOC

⁶⁴ NIOSH/ASSE (PDF) — Overlapping Vulnerabilities: Young immigrant workers in small construction firms: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2015-178/pdfs/2015-178.pdf>

⁶⁵ CDC/NIOSH (stacked PDF) — Promoting occupational health with a diverse workforce: https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/195320/cdc_195320_DS1.pdf

⁶⁶ DOL CRC — English-only rules: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/civil-rights-center/internal/policies/english-only-rules>

Without culturally relevant and accessible training and trusted reporting pathways, these workers are less likely to report harassment and more likely to remain in unsafe workplace environments.

5.6 LGBTQ+ Workers

LGBTQ+ workers may face harassment that involves sexualized misconduct with hostility toward a different gender identity or sexual orientation. Workers described experiences of being outed, misgendered, subjected to derogatory comments, or excluded from workplace social interactions. LGBTQ+ workers may also distrust reporting systems if they feel those systems are not equipped to recognize or respond appropriately to intersectional harassment.⁶⁷⁶⁸

5.7 Cross-Sector Pattern: Retaliation Fear as the Primary Barrier

Across all sectors, retaliation—formal or informal—was the most significant barrier to reporting. Workers consistently stated that:

- they believed reporting would make conditions worse,
- supervisors were unprepared or unwilling to intervene,
- peers would treat them differently, or
- that nothing would change.

Fear of retaliation is not only a legal concern. It is a cultural and structural reality that shapes worker behavior across industries.⁶⁹⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Williams Institute (PDF) — Workplace discrimination and harassment against LGBT adults:

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Discrimination-Sep-2021.pdf>

⁶⁸ EY (PDF) — U.S. LGBTQ+ Workplace Barometer: https://www.ey.com/content/dam/ey-unified-site/ey-com/en-us/campaigns/diversity-equity-inclusiveness/documents/ey_lgbtq_survey.pdf

⁶⁹ WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners). Sexual Harassment Is Underreported When the US Economy and Safety Net Are Weak: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/sexual-harassment-underreported-when-us-economy-and-safety-net-are-weak>

⁷⁰ HR Acuity — Why employees don't report mistreatment (fear, trust, perceived futility). <https://www.hracity.com/blog/why-employees-dont-report-workplace-mistreatment/>

6. CURRENT INITIATIVES

Maine has existing initiatives that provide a foundation for strengthening sexual harassment prevention, including SafetyWorks! employer consultation, online training resources, Women in Construction initiatives, and partnerships with organizations such as SAPARS and MECASA. These efforts demonstrate the value of collaboration and specialized expertise.

The Department's current efforts include:

- Partnering with the MHRC to develop and deliver a web-based training covering notice and training requirements under Title 26, the Maine Human Rights Act, and best practices for complaint handling;
- Updating the Sexual Harassment Compliance Checklist to provide a plain language guide for employers;
- Routinely checking for employer compliance with notice and training requirements during focused inspections by the Wage and Hour Division;
- Developing a brief online training module to help construction employers, supervisors, and workers create a more welcoming, safe and inclusive workplace for all workers, including women; and
- Updating workplace violence trainings to include concrete tools and skills for employers seeking to prevent and intervene in workplace sexual harassment.

At the same time, stakeholders emphasized the need for greater coordination, improved training quality, and clearer guidance for employers. The recommendations that follow build on existing work and identify opportunities to enhance prevention without duplicating efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose and Statutory Charge

Pursuant to Resolve 2025, Chapter 90, the Maine Department of Labor was directed to examine employer compliance with sexual harassment prevention requirements under Title 26 and to include any available data on employer compliance and noncompliance, as well as recommendations—including suggested legislation—for ways to strengthen employer compliance and strengthen sexual harassment prevention efforts in Maine workplaces.

This section responds directly to that charge.

Findings

Based on the Department’s review of available administrative data, stakeholder input, and national research, several consistent findings emerged:

- Employer compliance with statutory prevention requirements exists but varies widely in quality, effectiveness, and accessibility across sectors.
- Training practices range from robust, scenario-based and worker-informed approaches to minimal, passive, or generic online modules that are unlikely to produce durable culture change.
- Formal enforcement and complaint-based data reflect only a small fraction of actual workplace harm due to widespread underreporting driven by fear of retaliation, lack of trust in reporting systems, and sector-specific power dynamics.
- High-risk conditions are concentrated in certain sectors, particularly construction, skilled trades, health care, hospitality, service industries, and rural or isolated worksites.
- The Department’s analysis also identified a significant structural limitation: Maine currently lacks a comprehensive, coordinated data and research framework capable of capturing the prevalence, sector-specific dynamics, and lived experience of workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Existing administrative systems capture only a narrow subset of harm and are not designed to evaluate prevention effectiveness, underreporting, or cultural conditions within workplaces.

These conditions limit the State’s ability to evaluate prevention effectiveness, target high-risk sectors, and support consistent, evidence-based prevention strategies statewide.

Status of Ongoing Work

Based on early findings from this review, the Department has already begun taking steps to strengthen prevention and compliance efforts, including:

- Updating SafetyWorks! sexual harassment and OSHA-10 workplace violence training modules to better reflect occupational safety and health best practices
- Enhancing employer outreach and technical assistance related to Title 26 compliance
- Strengthening cross-agency coordination and information-sharing related to workplace safety and civil rights enforcement
- Expanding engagement with community-based partners to better understand sector-specific risks and barriers to reporting

The Department is also exploring opportunities to learn from national best practices and emerging research related to participatory, worker-informed approaches to preventing workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence. These learning-oriented efforts are intended to strengthen understanding of sector-specific risks, elevate worker experience, and inform continuous improvement of existing prevention, education, and compliance strategies over time.

These efforts are intended to improve prevention quality, strengthen employer compliance, and inform the recommendations that follow.

Recommendation 1

Build Toward a Coordinated Statewide Prevention and Data Infrastructure

Maine's current administrative data systems—workers' compensation claims, civil rights complaints, and limited employer reporting—do not provide a comprehensive or integrated picture of workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence. These systems were not designed to capture underreporting, sector-specific risks, cultural conditions, or the effectiveness of prevention strategies.

Establishing a coordinated statewide prevention and research infrastructure would strengthen the State's ability to understand, evaluate, and improve sexual harassment prevention efforts across sectors.

This long-term infrastructure could be designed to:

- Support coordinated research, data synthesis, and prevention evaluation
- Identify sector-specific and workforce-specific risk patterns
- Integrate quantitative administrative data with qualitative, worker-informed research
- Inform evidence-based training standards and compliance strategies
- Support continuous improvement of statewide prevention systems

Other states have begun to formalize similar research and prevention coordination functions through university-based or cross-agency research centers focused on workforce conditions and occupational risk. The University of Maine System, in collaboration with relevant state agencies

and community partners, may represent a potential future partner for supporting coordinated research, data development, and prevention evaluation efforts in Maine.

Recommendation 2

Strengthen Cross-Sector Coordination and Employer Support Systems

Stakeholder input consistently emphasized that workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence are shaped by sector-specific working conditions, workplace culture, power dynamics, and reporting barriers that cannot be addressed by any single agency or employer acting alone. Strengthening coordination among employers, workers, community partners, and public agencies would support more consistent, accessible, and effective prevention practices statewide.

Establishing a regular, voluntary forum for cross-sector coordination would strengthen Maine's ability to identify emerging risks, share effective prevention strategies, and support practical approaches to employer compliance and worker protection.

Coordination could include participation from:

- Employer and business organizations (e.g., Maine State Chamber of Commerce, NFIB, HospitalityMaine, construction and trades representatives, and small business owners)
- Labor and workforce development partners
- Worker representatives
- Community-based service providers (including MECASA and SAPARS)
- Maine Human Rights Commission
- Municipal and local government partners

Through this coordination, partners could:

- Share sector-specific prevention challenges and promising practices
- Exchange effective training and prevention models
- Identify barriers to reporting and early intervention
- Inform development of guidance, training resources, and employer supports
- Strengthen supervisor capacity to receive disclosures, prevent retaliation, and connect workers to appropriate resources
- Promote plain-language guidance, multi-pathway reporting options, and accessible resources for small and rural employers.
- Support integration of survivor-centered resources into employer notices and training materials

Coordination efforts should prioritize high-risk and underserved workforces, including construction and skilled trades, health care and service industries, rural and small workplaces, low-wage and precarious workers, New Mainers, workers with language or cultural barriers, and LGBTQ+ workers.

Recommendation 3

Promote High-Quality, Evidence-Based Prevention Training

Stakeholder input and national occupational safety and public health research consistently demonstrate that meaningful reductions in workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence are most strongly associated with interactive, skills-based, and repeated prevention strategies that are embedded in workplace culture, rather than one-time or purely compliance-oriented training.

Promoting clear, evidence-based standards for prevention-oriented training would strengthen employer compliance and improve the effectiveness of sexual harassment prevention efforts statewide.

Best-practice prevention training is characterized by:

- **Universal participation** — applying to all individuals who participate in the workplace, including executives, supervisors, employees, contractors, interns, and volunteers
- **Whole-workplace scope** — addressing the full “world of work,” including worksites, remote and online environments, restrooms, break rooms, employer-required off-site meetings, trainings, conferences, retreats, and employer-provided housing
- **In-person, interactive, and skills-based delivery** — emphasizing scenario-based learning, boundary-setting, and safe intervention skills over passive or purely online modules
- **Worker-informed and sector-responsive design** — incorporating worker input and tailoring content to sector-specific risks and job structures
- **Ongoing reinforcement** — recognizing that repeated training over time supports more durable culture change

Partners could further explore:

- Bystander-intervention and peer-based prevention models
- Culturally and linguistically responsive training approaches
- Sector-specific training strategies in high-risk industries
- Plain-language guidance on legal definitions and responsibilities
- Multiple reporting pathways (formal, informal, anonymous, internal, and external)
- Supervisor training on receiving disclosures, preventing retaliation, documentation, and referral pathways
- Accessible guidance and tools for small and rural employers
- Integration of survivor-centered support resources into employer notices and training materials

Appendices

Appendix A — Glossary of Terms

Bystander Intervention

An evidence-based prevention approach that equips individuals who witness or become aware of inappropriate, disrespectful, or harmful conduct with practical strategies to safely and effectively intervene, support affected individuals, and reinforce expectations of respectful workplace behavior.

Civil Rights Enforcement Process

The procedures administered by the Maine Human Rights Commission under the Maine Human Rights Act for receiving, investigating, and resolving discrimination complaints, including those involving sexual harassment.

Crew Culture

Informal workplace norms, social dynamics, and behavioral expectations that develop within work teams and can influence how workers experience belonging, safety, reporting, and accountability.

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH)

A broad term describing violence, harassment, or harmful conduct directed at an individual based on gender, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or related characteristics, including sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based hostility in the workplace.

Harassment (Sexual Harassment)

Unwelcome conduct based on sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or related characteristics that affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment, as defined under the Maine Human Rights Act and applicable federal law.

Informal Retaliation

Adverse treatment that may not rise to the level of formal disciplinary action but can include social ostracism, exclusion from work opportunities, increased scrutiny, undesirable assignments, or other actions that discourage reporting or participation in workplace processes.

Low-Wage or Precarious Work

Employment characterized by limited job security, variable or unpredictable schedules, temporary or seasonal status, part-time or gig-based arrangements, or economic vulnerability that can heighten risks related to harassment and underreporting.

New Mainers

Individuals who have recently immigrated to Maine and may face language, cultural, or systemic barriers when navigating workplace rights and reporting pathways.

Psychosocial Hazards

Workplace conditions or practices that may contribute to psychological or emotional harm, including chronic stress, intimidation, isolation, or hostile environments.

Sector-Specific Risk Factors

Workplace structures, job characteristics, and industry dynamics that can influence vulnerability to harassment, access to reporting pathways, and employer capacity to respond effectively.

Silent Attrition

The phenomenon in which workers leave employment due to harassment, hostile workplace conditions, or lack of trusted reporting options without filing formal complaints.

World of Work

A framework, reflected in international labor standards, that recognizes that work-related relationships and power dynamics extend beyond the physical workplace to include work-related travel, employer-provided housing, training, conferences, and work-connected social activities.

Appendix B — Statutory and Regulatory Framework

This appendix summarizes the principal state and federal statutory, regulatory, and policy authorities referenced in this report and provides contextual grounding for Maine’s workplace sexual harassment prevention and enforcement framework.

Maine Statutory Framework**Title 26, Chapter 7, Subchapter 4-B — Sexual Harassment Prevention**

Maine law requires employers to take specific actions to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. Under Title 26, Chapter 7, Subchapter 4-B, employers must:

- Maintain a written sexual harassment policy;
- Provide written notice of the policy to new employees;
- Display a poster summarizing worker rights and protections;
- Provide annual training to employees and supervisors; and
- Retain records of training for a minimum of three years.

MDOL provides compliance guidance, and the Maine Human Rights Commission posts a compliance checklist to assist employers in meeting these requirements.

Maine Human Rights Act (Title 5, Chapter 337)

The Maine Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other protected characteristics, including sexual harassment. The Act authorizes the Maine Human Rights Commission to:

- Receive and investigate discrimination complaints;
- Conduct fact-finding and issue determinations;
- Facilitate conciliation; and
- Pursue litigation in the public interest.

The Act establishes the civil rights enforcement framework for addressing sexual harassment complaints in Maine.

Related State Initiatives

Governor’s Executive Order on Women in Construction

The Governor’s Executive Order on Women in Construction directs state agencies to promote recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in construction and skilled trades and to strengthen coordination among workforce development, education, and employer partners.

Federal and National Frameworks

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VII prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of sex and serves as the federal foundation for sexual harassment protections in the workplace. Federal interpretations and enforcement practices inform state-level standards and guidance.

Occupational Safety and Health Framework

Federal occupational safety and health standards establish baseline employer obligations related to workplace safety, training, and hazard prevention. While sexual harassment is primarily addressed through civil rights law, workplace violence prevention and psychosocial safety considerations intersect with occupational safety and health practices.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190

ILO Convention 190 recognizes violence and harassment in the “world of work” as occupational safety and health issues and affirms the importance of comprehensive prevention, reporting, and response systems that extend beyond formal worksites to work-connected activities, travel, and housing.

Appendix C — Evidence and Research References

This appendix summarizes the principal research, guidance, and evidence-based frameworks referenced throughout the report. These sources reflect a cross-section of federal, business-community, labor-market, public health, and international standards that inform nationally recognized best practices for preventing workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

Federal and Public Health Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) / National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

NIOSH identifies workplace violence, harassment, and psychosocial hazards as occupational health concerns and emphasizes prevention through training, organizational culture, and system-level interventions.

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violence/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/stress/about/index.html>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

BLS publishes national data on workplace violence, injury patterns, and sector-specific risk, including health care, social assistance, and service industries.

<https://www.bls.gov/iif/>

<https://www.bls.gov/iif/factsheets/workplace-violence-2021-2022.htm>

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

EEOC publishes national data, enforcement information, and research on sexual harassment and discrimination.

<https://www.eeoc.gov/data>

<https://www.eeoc.gov/sexual-harassment>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

OSHA provides national guidance on worker training, safety management systems, and hazard prevention.

<https://www.osha.gov/training>

<https://www.osha.gov/safety-management>

Business and Employer-Community Sources

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

SHRM publishes employer-focused research and guidance on sexual harassment prevention, training practices, and reporting systems.

<https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/hr-topics/employee-relations/sexual-harassment>

HR Acuity

HR Acuity publishes compliance-oriented research on reporting behavior, retaliation concerns, and trust in employer systems.

<https://www.hracuity.com/resources/>

National Safety Council (NSC)

NSC publishes business-facing data and prevention guidance on workplace violence and assault.

<https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/>

<https://www.nsc.org/workplace/safety-topics/workplace-violence>

National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)

NCCER publishes research on women’s experiences, retention, and workplace culture in construction and skilled trades.

<https://www.nccer.org/research/>

<https://www.nccer.org/workforce-development/women-in-construction/>

Labor Market and Workforce Policy Research

WorkRise Network (Urban Institute & partners)

WorkRise publishes labor-market research on reporting behavior, economic vulnerability, and worker safety.

<https://www.workrisenetwork.org/>

Williams Institute (UCLA School of Law)

The Williams Institute publishes national research on workplace discrimination and harassment affecting LGBTQ+ workers.

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/>

International Standards and Frameworks

International Labour Organization (ILO) — Convention 190

ILO Convention 190 establishes international standards recognizing violence and harassment in the “world of work” as occupational safety and health issues.

<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/violence-harassment/lang--en/index.html>

Evidence-Based Prevention Models

Green Dot Bystander Intervention Model

Green Dot is an evidence-based bystander intervention framework supported by peer-reviewed research demonstrating reductions in sexual violence and improvements in safety norms.

<https://alteristic.org/green-dot/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5444914/>

Appendix D — Stakeholder Engagement and Acknowledgments

This report was informed by input from individuals and organizations with expertise in civil rights enforcement, workforce policy, occupational safety, community-based survivor support, and lived experience related to workplace sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Engagement activities included facilitated discussions, individual consultations, and written feedback and were conducted to better understand sector-specific conditions, emerging challenges, and practical considerations for prevention, reporting, and response across Maine’s economy.

Stakeholders contributed insights regarding workplace culture, power dynamics, barriers to reporting, and opportunities for improving prevention and compliance efforts. Their perspectives were essential to shaping the sector-specific analysis and the best-practice considerations presented in this report.

Key Themes Raised

Stakeholders consistently highlighted:

- Sector-specific differences in harassment risk and reporting barriers
- The importance of trusted, accessible reporting pathways
- The need for practical, evidence-based training approaches
- Challenges faced by small and rural employers
- Barriers affecting New Mainers, young workers, and vulnerable populations
- The role of workplace culture and power dynamics in shaping reporting behavior

Acknowledgments

The Department extends sincere appreciation to the individuals and organizations that contributed their time, professional expertise, and lived experience to inform this work. Contributors included, but were not limited to:

- Maine Human Rights Commission
- Maine Commission on the Status of Women
- Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA)

- Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services (SAPARS)
- Former community organization leaders and workforce advocates
- National partners with expertise in workplace safety and strategies to create safer work environments for all workers

Their participation strengthened the analysis and helped ensure that this report reflects diverse perspectives and real-world workplace conditions across Maine.