

Clara Porter  
Portland  
LD 1554

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and the members of the labor committee, My name is Clara Porter, I am a longtime resident of Portland and the Director of Prevention. Action. Change. I am here to testify in support of LD 1554, An Act to Require Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Restaurant Employess.

Prevention. Action. Change. works to foster safe and welcoming workplaces through training in violence prevention, intervention, and response. We are an approved trainer with the Alford Foundation Compact Program and work with organizations and companies - most in the hospitality industry - across the state providing training in De-escalation, Active Bystander Intervention, Empowerment Self Defense, and Since 2017, Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response.

The companies we work with regularly - often annually - are committed to creating and maintaining safe and welcoming workplaces for customers and employees. They have effective channels of communication and address issues quickly and at lower levels thereby preventing escalation and policy violations resulting in less turnover than is typical in the industry. They are healthy, collaborative work places and they are not the majority of hospitality venues in the state.

In 2021, Brienne Allan, co-owner of Sacred Profane in Biddeford and Portland, helped launch Brave Noise, an initiative advocating for safe spaces and inclusive environments in the beer industry, asking Breweries to create and publish a code of conduct for employees and patrons and to donate the majority of sales of a Brave Noise beer to an organization that supports the project's mission. This initiative and the social media reckoning around sexual harassment in the brewing industry that prompted it, have created change.

Yet, sexual harassment is systemic and lasting change requires the support of regulations which make make hospitality companies across the state comply with basic training and reporting practices.

The impacts of sexual harassment on the person targeted are severe: health impacts, lost work hours, and opportunities for advancement to name just a few. And those impacts go far beyond the individual. For the company the impacts range from loss of cohesion to high turnover, and real safety impacts. Skilled employees bounce from venue to venue looking for a safe place to land and grow their career.

According to the EEOC, 85% of women who formally report sexual harassment experience retaliation. No wonder only about 20% of women ever formally report.

We also know that 50% of young workers of all genders and identities experience sexual harassment in their first jobs. 50%. That experience can impact them in the long term.

Let's take this important step in bringing all Maine hospitality businesses up to a common standard that will protect workers and customers and make our state flourish.

I thank the Labor Committee for hearing my testimony and urge you to support LD 1554.

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