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Bipartisan Legislation to Improve Capitol Culture Advances Through the Legislature

Bills update rules, create independent Legislative Equity Office

SALEM – Bipartisan legislation aimed at improving the culture of the Oregon State Capitol has passed the Oregon House of Representatives. House Concurrent Resolution 20 and House Bill 3377 update internal Capitol rules, ensure ongoing respectful workplace trainings and establish the independent Legislative Equity Office to handle complaints.

“This transformative legislation comes to us with support from across party lines, across the Legislature, across the political spectrum to make a major difference in the lives of all those who work in and visit our Capitol,” said House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson (D-Portland). “This legislative package is designed to make sure everyone, no matter who they are, can feel safe and respected every day.”

[House Concurrent Resolution 20](#) updates the legislature’s current safe and respectful workplace policies, which cover harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination, and expands the list of those subject to the respectful workplace rule beyond just legislators and staff to also include interns, externs, volunteers, lobbyists, contractors, agency employees and members of the public at the Capitol.

[House Bill 3377](#) creates a new independent, nonpartisan office within the Legislative Branch called the Legislative Equity Office. The office will be led by the Legislative Equity Officer to be hired by the Joint Conduct Committee, which is an evenly split, bipartisan, bicameral committee. The Legislative Equity Office is tasked with overseeing respectful workplace trainings, providing advice to individuals about their options with complaint and reporting processes, and investigating complaints. An offsite process counselor, modeled after the Title IX reporting on college campuses, will also be hired to provide confidential counseling about all options that are available for any individual who has experienced or witnessed harassing or discriminatory behavior involving the Capitol.

The data from Title IX shows that when a person has experienced assault or harassment and has a safe, confidential and independent place to talk about their experience, they are far more likely to report it.

Three new reporting options are available to individuals who have experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment. The reporting options seek to provide individuals with a full range

of options to have their complaints handled to their satisfaction. These options are available through the Legislative Equity Office, in addition to the offsite process counselor established in HB 3377, as well as other external processes through the Bureau of Labor and Industries, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, law enforcement and civil procedures.

“Though terrible circumstances brought us to this point, I hope through the pain of survivors that something positive can come forward,” Rep. Williamson added. “We have to remain vigilant. Our fight against harassment and discrimination is ongoing – and this legislation is merely one piece of ongoing work. Today, though, I believe we can say Time’s Up for sexual assault, harassment and discrimination in our State Capitol.”

The legislation is the product of more than a year of work by a wide variety of experts and a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators.

In February 2018, House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney asked the Oregon Law Commission to review and advise the Legislature on how best to revise its laws and policies related to workplace harassment. After months of public meetings, the Law Commission met and approved the final document on Dec. 21 and forwarded it to legislative leaders on Jan. 2.

The bipartisan, bicameral Joint Committee on Capitol Culture took that report and developed legislation. For four months, the committee heard from survivors of sexual assault, individuals who have experienced various forms of harassment, and experts in the fields of employment law and Title IX law. This legislation is the product of that committee.

Bureau of Labor and Industries Commissioner Val Hoyle attended the final meeting to thank the members for their work and acknowledge that the legislation fulfilled an earlier BOLI settlement agreement with the Oregon Legislature.

“I appreciate the sincere, bipartisan commitment to implementing the conciliation agreement and to providing a safe and respectful working environment for all who enter the Capitol,”

[Commissioner Hoyle said in a letter submitted to the committee.](#)

The committee, which had an even split of Democrats and Republicans, was led by Rep. Williamson, Sen. Ginny Burdick (D-Portland), Rep. Carl Wilson (R-Grants Pass) and Sen. Tim Knopp (R-Bend). In addition, the committee membership included Senators Herman Baertschiger (R-Grants Pass), Shemia Fagan (D-Portland), Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene) and Kim Thatcher (R-Keizer); and Representatives Denyc Boles (R-Salem), Julie Fahey (D-Eugene), Tawna Sanchez (D-Portland), and Sherrie Sprenger (R-Scio).

HCR 20 and HB 3377 both passed 57 to 2. Both bills now go to the Oregon Senate for consideration.

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