

## Unlawful Workplace Harassment

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**Purpose** The purpose of this policy is to establish that the State of North Carolina prohibits unlawful workplace harassment of State employees, and to require that every agency subject to the State Personnel Act establish policies and programs to ensure that work sites are free from unlawful workplace harassment. This policy also prohibits retaliation against employees.

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**Policy** The policy of the State of North Carolina is that no State employee may engage in conduct that falls under the definition of unlawful workplace harassment indicated below. All employees are guaranteed the right to work in an environment free from unlawful workplace harassment and retaliation.

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**Definitions**

**Unlawful Workplace Harassment** is unwelcomed or unsolicited speech or conduct based upon race, sex, creed, religion, national origin, age, color, or handicapping condition as defined by G.S. 168A-3 that creates a hostile work environment or circumstances involving quid pro quo.

**Hostile Work Environment** is one that both a reasonable person would find hostile or abusive and one that the particular person who is the object of the harassment perceives to be hostile or abusive. Hostile work environment is determined by looking at all of the circumstances, including the frequency of the allegedly harassing conduct, its severity, whether it is physically threatening or humiliating, and whether it unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance.

**Quid Pro Quo** harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, or (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual.

**Retaliation** is adverse treatment which occurs because of opposition to unlawful workplace harassment.

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## Unlawful Workplace Harassment, Continued

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Advisory Note: Sexual Harassment does not include personal compliments welcomed by the recipient, or social interaction or relationships freely entered into by State employees or prospective employees.

Advisory Note: The U.S. Supreme Court recently held “that nothing in Title VII necessarily bars a claim of discrimination ‘because of ... sex’ merely because the ” grievant and the alleged harasser “are of the same sex”.

Advisory Note: Hostile includes offensive, aggressive, antagonistic, belligerent, and/or contentious behavior involving unlawful workplace harassment based on age, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, or handicapping condition as defined by G.S. 168A-3. A hostile work environment is determined by looking at the following: 1) whether the environment is objectively offensive in the eyes of a reasonable person, 2) whether the environment is subjectively offensive in the eyes of the person who is the object of the alleged harassment, and 3) the nature of the alleged hostility.

Advisory Note: Conduct towards an outside vendor or contractor that would constitute unlawful workplace harassment toward an employee could constitute unacceptable personal conduct.

Advisory Note: Examples of quid pro quo unlawful workplace harassment include:

1. A supervisor promises an employee a promotion if the employee acquiesces to sexual advances.
2. A supervisor begins each staff meeting with a prayer session conducted by a Christian minister. A Jewish employee refuses to participate in the prayer session and is terminated because of this refusal.

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### Coverage

Former employee, full-time or part-time employee with either a permanent, probationary, trainee, time-limited permanent or temporary appointment.

Advisory Note: While applicants are not covered under the State statute (SB78), they are covered under other State and Federal Civil Rights Acts.

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## Unlawful Workplace Harassment, Continued

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### Grievance Procedures and Appeals

1. Grievant must submit a written complaint to the employing agency within 30 calendar days of the alleged harassing action.
2. Employing agency shall take appropriate remedial action within 60 calendar days from receipt of written complaint unless the employing agency has waived the 60-day period, and grievant has acknowledged such waiver. The waiver and acknowledgement shall be in writing.

Advisory Note: The underlined provision was approved by the State Personnel Commission on August 17, 2000. This is currently in the rule-making process. The State Personnel Director has approved use of this provision as an exception pending final approval of the rule.

3. The employing agency shall provide a written response to the grievant when the agency has determined what action, if any, will result from the grievant's written complaint. Agency grievance procedures shall include this responsibility.
4. After the agency's 60 calendar day (or less, if waived) response period has expired, the grievant may appeal directly to the Office of Administrative Hearings and the State Personnel Commission within 30 calendar days if not satisfied with the agency's response to complaint.

Advisory Note: A grievant has a right to file a simultaneous complaint under Title VII with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Advisory Note: An individual with a grievance concerning a denial of employment, promotion, training, or transfer, or concerning a demotion, layoff, transfer or termination due to discrimination based on age, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, political affiliation or handicapping condition as defined by G.S. 168A-3, or a grievance based on retaliation for opposition to alleged discrimination may still appeal directly to the Office of Administrative Hearings and the State Personnel Commission.

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**Reporting** Each agency is required to maintain and report unlawful workplace harassment complaints through established grievance reporting mechanisms in the Personnel Management Information System (PMIS).

In addition, if an unlawful workplace harassment complaint is settled between the grievant and the employing agency, the agency shall report to the Commission what disciplinary action and/or remedial action, if any, was taken by the agency. Disciplinary action, if appropriate, can be up to and including dismissal.

The Commission may order the Office of State Personnel to conduct an investigation into the sufficiency of the agency's actions in any unlawful workplace harassment complaint. The Office of State Personnel will report to the Commission the conclusion(s) of the investigation and, if appropriate, may then report the Office of State Personnel's findings with regard to the disciplinary action and/or remedial action to the agency head.

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**Prevention Plan** Each agency head or university chancellor shall develop an unlawful workplace harassment prevention plan or policies and procedures to comply with and implement the law and rules pertaining to unlawful workplace harassment. The workplace harassment prevention plan or policies and procedures shall be submitted as part of the agency's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) plan.

The plan shall set forth the steps to prevent and correct unlawful workplace harassment. Each unlawful workplace harassment plan shall, at the minimum, include:

1. A policy statement, signed by the agency head or university chancellor, establishing that unlawful workplace harassment or retaliation against employees is prohibited;
  2. A process for disseminating to new and existing employees the unlawful workplace harassment policy of the agency;
  3. A statement that the agency will, in allegations of unlawful workplace harassment, review the totality of the circumstances, to determine whether the alleged conduct constitutes unlawful workplace harassment;
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**Unlawful Workplace Harassment, Continued**

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**Prevention  
Plan  
(continued)**

4. Establishment of internal procedures to handle complaints of unlawful workplace harassment. These procedures shall provide for: (a) written complaint from employee to agency, (b) grievant right to bypass any step in the applicable agency procedure involving review of or decisions by the alleged harasser, (c) agency response with remedial action and notification to grievant within 60 calendar days (or less if waived) of receipt of written complaint or written waiver of 60-day period and acknowledgement thereof, (d) a clause detailing the prohibition against retaliation, and (e) a clause detailing an employee's concurrent right to appeal to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC);
  5. Training and other methods to prevent unlawful workplace harassment;
  6. Method for implementing appropriate disciplinary actions to address unlawful workplace harassment and to assure that disciplinary actions shall be consistently and fairly applied; and
  7. Prohibition of internal interference, coercion, restraint, retaliation, or reprisal against any person complaining of alleged unlawful workplace harassment.
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