

From: [Paulin, Susan](#) on behalf of [O'Connor, M. Rick](#)
To: [=City Councillors Assistants](#)
Cc: [Watson, Jim \(Mayor/Maire\)](#); [=City Council](#); [Arpin, Serge](#); [Guest, Robyn](#); [>Senior Leadership Team](#); [White, David](#); [Marland, Elizabeth](#); [Lanthier-Seymour, Andrea](#); [Barriere, Caroline](#); [Anderson, Kiel](#); [Cox, Tyler](#); [Rochette, Michele](#); [Berlinguette-Saumure, Lucille](#); [Johnston, Kim](#); [Paulin, Susan](#)
Subject: Workplace Harassment - City HR Resources and Supports
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La version française suivra.

In light of recent media reports, I wanted to reiterate to you the City of Ottawa's commitment to providing a work environment where employees, including councillors assistants can work free from harassment. When employees experience harassment in the workplace, it is important that they know where they can turn for help, and what resources are available to support them. To that end, I want to take this opportunity to highlight the resources available to employees of elected officials, and also to outline what avenues are available to address concerns about harassment.

Harassment occurs when a person engages in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace which is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome. This also includes **workplace sexual harassment**.

As part of its commitment to a harassment-free workplace, the City has a [Violence and Harassment in the Workplace Policy](#) and a [Violence and Harassment in the Workplace Program](#). The Policy and Program outline how any employee can make a complaint, and also how these complaints are investigated. This Policy and Program are reviewed at least yearly, and more often if necessary.

Furthermore, Ottawa City Council has adopted a Code of Conduct for Members of Council that includes the following statement on harassment:

All members of Council have a duty to treat members of the public, one another and staff with respect and without abuse, bullying or intimidation, and to ensure that their work environment is free from

discrimination and harassment. The Ontario Human Rights Code applies and, where applicable, the City's *Violence and Harassment in the Workplace Policy*.

Where someone believes that there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct, a complaint can be filed with the City's Integrity Commissioner, who reports directly to City Council and who undertakes investigations into complaints alleging contraventions of the Code. Complainants have the option of pursuing an informal process or a formal complaint. The informal procedure involves:

1. Advising the Member that the behaviour or activity appears to contravene the Code of Conduct
2. Encouraging the Member to acknowledge and agree to stop the prohibited behaviour or activity and to avoid future occurrences of the prohibited behaviour or activity
3. Documenting the incidents including dates, times, locations, other persons present, and any other relevant information
4. Requesting the Integrity Commissioner to assist in informal discussion of the alleged complaint with the Member in an attempt to resolve the issue
5. If applicable, confirming to the member your satisfaction with the response of the Member; or, if applicable, advising the Member of your dissatisfaction with the response

If anyone wants to file a formal complaint with the Integrity Commissioner, information on that process, as well as a link to the complaint form, is available here:

<https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/accountability-and-transparency/accountability-framework/code-conduct-members-council-and-related-policies>

Please note that the Employee Assistance Program is available to all City of Ottawa employees, including employees in the offices of elected officials. The EAP is a confidential counselling service available that employees can access by

contacting 613-580-2424 x23816 (press #1 to reach the EAP Provider). All City employees are eligible for six counselling sessions per year, for individual or couples counselling. Spouses and dependent children (aged 14-25) are entitled to 1-2 sessions for assessment and referral purposes.

For crisis support, contact the 24-hour Call Centre at (613) 580-2458. Crisis services are available during the daytime, evenings and on weekends. When you call, you will be connected to a 311 Agent. Leave your first name and a telephone number where you can immediately be reached. The 311 Agent will contact the on-call counsellor, and have them telephone you.

On a final note, in consultation with the Mayor, Councillor Kavanagh and a number of their Council colleagues, I will be undertaking a review of the recruitment and hiring process for councillors assistants to ensure that they reflect best practices and respect the City's legal obligations and its commitment to being an employer of choice.

I hope the above information is helpful. If you have any questions, or want more information about any of the resources noted above, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or Lucille Berlinguette-Saumure at ext. 21629, or the City's Director of Human Resources, Elizabeth Marland at ext. 25194.

Thank you,
Rick

M. Rick O'Connor, CMO, LLB | OMA, LL.B.

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