

IL Senate Task Force on Sexual Harassment Delves into Both Public and Private Sector Issues

Amundsen Davis Government Entities Alert

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In December of 2018, I was honored to be appointed to the Illinois Senate's Task Force on Sexual Discrimination and Harassment Awareness and Prevention. On December 14, 2018 the full Task Force had its first hearing in Chicago, Illinois. At the December 14, 2017 hearing the Cook County State's Attorney's office provided both statistical and victim impact information regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment. The States Attorney's office representatives were followed by the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) Acting and Deputy Directors who testified about the administrative and investigative process at the IDHR. Before the hearing concluded, three private sector attorneys, including myself, testified regarding the litigation process from both the employer and plaintiff perspective. The second full hearing was held on January 30, 2018 and examined and discussed new ethics rules for elected officials and state employees.

The third hearing was held on March 5, 2018, and was filled with the emotional testimony of women recounting their stories of harassment. Approximately 10 women from Ford Motor Company's two Chicago plants, testified about alleged incidents of sexual harassment. This testimony was followed by representatives from the UNITE HERE labor union who represent hotel, gaming and food service employees in the US and Canada. In a different facet of the sexual harassment issue, UNITE HERE representatives recounted both the statistical and personal stories of their members' experiences with hotel and casino guests. In doing so they not only testified about the impact of sexual harassment, by hotel patrons on hotel workers, but also campaigned to help pass the City of Chicago's panic button ordinance for hotel workers.

While the full Task Force is still in the investigative stage, working drafts of anti-harassment legislation are already being developed and reviewed. The full Senate Task Force hearings are supplemented by approximately seven smaller subgroups which are providing working groups to address and assist in proposals for the Senate on possible legislative change. These groups range from an examination of civil court procedures and remedies through best practices and intersectional issues. Together the subgroups and the full Task Force have

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been asked to conduct a comprehensive review of the legal and social consequences of sexual discrimination and harassment in both the public and private sectors. The next hearing is scheduled for March 15, 2018 at 1:00 p.m. in Springfield Illinois (all hearings are live streamed and accessible at ilga.gov) and will delve further into pending legislation related to the Task Force's mission. The Task Force and its mission have the potential to impact both the public and private sector. While the nature and breathe of the proposals has yet to be determined, the motivation to implement change has definitely been hardened.

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