



## **Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy**

*This policy is a system-wide policy for application to all libraries within the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System.*

This policy is also part of the *Buffalo & Erie County Public Library Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual*.

### **I. Statement of Policy**

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL) is committed to maintaining an environment free from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a form of workplace discrimination and it is against the law. This policy is one component of B&ECPL's commitment to a discrimination-free environment. Everyone has a legal right to a workplace free from sexual harassment. All employees working in B&ECPL locations are required to work in a manner that prevents sexual harassment and are urged to report sexual harassment by filing a complaint internally with the B&ECPL. Complaints may also be filed with a government agency or in court under federal, state or local antidiscrimination laws.

#### **A. Applicability**

1. This policy applies to all employees, applicants for employment, interns, whether paid or unpaid, contractors and persons conducting business with B&ECPL, without regard to immigration status.
2. All employees, paid or unpaid interns, and non-employees are expected to follow and uphold this policy. This policy must be provided to all employees and should be posted prominently in all work locations to the extent practicable and be provided to employees upon hiring.
3. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated. Any employee or individual covered by this policy who engages in sexual harassment or retaliation will be subject to remedial and/or disciplinary action (e.g., counseling, suspension, termination).
4. Employees of every level who engage in sexual harassment, including managers and supervisors who engage in sexual harassment or who allow such behavior to continue, will be penalized for such misconduct.
5. Patrons and other non-employees who engage in sexual harassment will be addressed in accordance with each library's Rules of Conduct and applicable laws.

6. Sexual harassment may subject B&ECPL to liability for harm to targets of sexual harassment; and harassers may also be individually subject to liability.
7. Harmless intent is not a defense for harassment or discrimination.

B. What Is “Sexual Harassment”?

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is unlawful under federal, state, and (where applicable) local law. Sexual harassment includes harassment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, self-identified or perceived sex, gender expression, gender identity and the status of being transgender.

1. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome conduct which is either of a sexual nature, or which is directed at an individual because of that individual’s sex when:
  - a. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment, even if the reporting individual is not the intended target of the sexual harassment;
  - b. Such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment; or
  - c. Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting an individual’s employment.
2. A sexually harassing hostile work environment includes, but is not limited to, words, signs, jokes, pranks, intimidation or physical violence which are of a sexual nature, or which are directed at an individual because of that individual’s sex. Sexual harassment also consists of any unwanted verbal or physical advances, sexually explicit derogatory statements or sexually discriminatory remarks made by someone which are offensive or objectionable to the recipient, or cause the recipient discomfort or humiliation, or interfere with the recipient’s job performance.
3. Sexual harassment also occurs when a person in authority tries to trade job benefits for sexual favors. This can include hiring, promotion, continued employment or any other terms, conditions or privileges of employment. This is also called “quid pro quo” harassment.

Anyone covered by this policy who feels harassed should report so that any violation of this policy can be corrected promptly. Any harassing conduct, even a single incident, can be addressed under this policy, regardless of whether such harassment would be considered severe or pervasive under precedent applied to harassment claims.

### C. Examples of Sexual Harassment

The following describes some of the types of acts that may be unlawful sexual harassment and that are strictly prohibited:

1. Physical acts of a sexual nature, such as:
  - a. Touching, pinching, patting, kissing, hugging, grabbing, brushing against another employee's body or poking another employee's body;
  - b. Rape, sexual battery, molestation or attempts to commit these assaults.
2. Unwanted sexual advances or propositions, such as:
  - a. Requests for sexual favors accompanied by implied or overt threats concerning the target's job performance evaluation, a promotion or other job benefits or detriments;
  - b. Subtle or obvious pressure for unwelcome sexual activities.
3. Sexually oriented gestures, noises, remarks or jokes, or comments about a person's sexuality or sexual experience, which create a hostile work environment.
4. Sex stereotyping occurs when conduct or personality traits are considered inappropriate simply because they may not conform to other people's ideas or perceptions about how individuals of a particular sex should act or look.
5. Sexual or discriminatory displays or publications anywhere in the workplace, such as:
  - a. Displaying pictures, posters, calendars, graffiti, objects, promotional material, reading materials or other materials that are sexually demeaning or pornographic. This includes such sexual displays on workplace computers or cell phones and sharing such displays while in the workplace.
6. Hostile actions taken against an individual because of that individual's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and the status of being transgender, such as:
  - a. Interfering with, destroying or damaging a person's workstation, tools or equipment, or otherwise interfering with the individual's ability to perform the job;
  - b. Sabotaging an individual's work;
  - c. Bullying, yelling, name-calling;
  - d. Stereotyping or treating individuals differently because they identify as cisgender, transgender, or non-binary.

### D. Who can be a target of sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment can occur between any individuals, regardless of their sex or gender. New York Law protects employees, paid or unpaid interns, and non-

employees, including independent contractors, and those employed by companies contracting to provide services in the workplace. Harassers can be a superior, a subordinate, a coworker or anyone in the workplace including an independent contractor, contract worker, vendor, client, customer or visitor.

E. Where can sexual harassment occur?

Unlawful sexual harassment is not limited to the physical workplace itself. It can occur while employees are traveling for business or at employer sponsored events or parties. Calls, texts, emails, and social media usage by employees can constitute unlawful workplace harassment, even if they occur away from the workplace premises, on personal devices or during non-work hours.

## **II. Prohibition Against Retaliation**

No person covered by this Policy shall be subject to adverse action because the employee reports an incident of sexual harassment, provides information, or otherwise assists in any investigation of a sexual harassment complaint. B&ECPL will not tolerate such retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, reports or provides information about suspected sexual harassment. Any employee of B&ECPL who retaliates against anyone involved in a sexual harassment investigation will be subjected to disciplinary action, up to and including termination. All employees, paid or unpaid interns, or non-employees working in the workplace who believe they have been subject to such retaliation should inform a supervisor, manager or the Human Resources Office. All employees, paid or unpaid interns, or non-employees who believe they have been a target of such retaliation may also seek relief in other available forums, as explained under Section 5 Legal Protections.

A. What is retaliation?

Unlawful retaliation can be any action that could discourage a worker from coming forward to make or support a sexual harassment claim. Adverse action need not be job-related or occur in the workplace to constitute unlawful retaliation (e.g., threats of physical violence outside of work hours). Retaliation may also include, but is not limited to, disclosing an employee's personnel files because they have opposed any practices forbidden under the New York State Human Rights Law ("NYS HRL"), filed a complaint, testified or assisted in any proceeding under NYS HRL, except where the disclosure is made in the course of commencing or responding to a complaint in any proceeding under the NYS HRL or any other civil or criminal action or other judicial or administrative proceeding as permitted by applicable law.

Such retaliation is unlawful under federal, state, and (where applicable) local law. The NYS HRL protects any individual who has engaged in "protected activity." Protected activity occurs when a person has:

1. Made a complaint of sexual harassment, either internally or with any anti-discrimination agency;
2. Testified or assisted in a proceeding involving sexual harassment under the Human Rights Law or other anti-discrimination law;
3. Opposed sexual harassment by making a verbal or informal complaint to management, or by simply informing a supervisor or manager of harassment;
4. Reported that another employee has been sexually harassed; or
5. Encouraged a fellow employee to report harassment.

B. Good Faith Claims

Even if the alleged harassment does not turn out to rise to the level of a violation of law, the individual is protected from retaliation if the person had a good faith belief that the practices were unlawful; however, the retaliation provision is not intended to protect persons making intentionally false charges of harassment.

**III. Reporting Sexual Harassment**

A. Who Should Report

Preventing sexual harassment is everyone's responsibility. B&ECPL cannot prevent or remedy sexual harassment unless it knows about it. Any employee, paid or unpaid intern, or non-employee who has been subjected to behavior that may constitute sexual harassment is encouraged to report such behavior to a supervisor, manager or the Human Resources Office. Anyone who witnesses or becomes aware of potential instances of sexual harassment should report such behavior to a supervisor, manager or the Human Resources Office.

Reports of sexual harassment may be made verbally or in writing. A form for submission of a written complaint is attached to this policy, and all employees are encouraged to use this complaint form. Employees who are reporting sexual harassment on behalf of another person should use the complaint form and note that it is on another person's behalf.

B. Supervisory Responsibilities

All supervisors and managers who receive a complaint or information about suspected sexual harassment, observe what may be sexually harassing behavior or for any reason suspect that sexual harassment is occurring, are required to report such suspected sexual harassment to the Human Resources Office. In addition to being subject to discipline if they engaged in sexually harassing conduct themselves, supervisors and managers will be subject to discipline for

failing to report suspected sexual harassment or otherwise knowingly allowing sexual harassment to continue.

Supervisors and managers will also be subject to discipline for engaging in any retaliation.

#### **IV. Complaint and Investigation of Sexual Harassment**

An investigation of any complaint, information or knowledge of suspected sexual harassment will be prompt and thorough, commenced immediately and completed as soon as possible. The investigation will be kept confidential to the extent possible. All persons involved, including complainants, witnesses and alleged harassers will be accorded due process, as outlined below, to protect their rights to a fair and impartial investigation.

##### **A. Complaint**

All complaints or information about sexual harassment will be investigated, whether that information was reported in verbal or written form.

##### **B. Witnesses**

All employees, including managers and supervisors, are required to cooperate with any internal investigation of sexual harassment. B&ECPL will not tolerate retaliation against employees who file complaints, support another's complaint or participate in an investigation regarding a violation of this Policy.

##### **C. Investigation Process**

While the process may vary from case to case, the following steps of the investigation process will ensure a thorough and complete investigation:

1. Upon receipt of complaint, the Human Resources Office will conduct an immediate review of the allegations, and take any interim actions, as appropriate.
2. If complaint is verbal, encourage the individual to complete the "Complaint Form" in writing. If they refuse, the Human Resources Office will prepare a Complaint Form based on the verbal complaint.
3. If documents, emails or phone records are relevant to the investigation, take steps to obtain and preserve them.
4. Request and review all relevant documents, including all electronic communications.
5. Interview all parties involved, including any relevant witnesses.
6. Create a written documentation of the investigation (such as a letter, memo or email), which contains the following:

- a. A list of all documents reviewed, along with a detailed summary of relevant documents;
  - b. A list of names of those interviewed, along with a detailed summary of their statements;
  - c. A timeline of events;
  - d. A summary of prior relevant incidents, reported or unreported; and
  - e. The basis for the decision and final resolution of the complaint, together with any corrective action(s).
7. Keep the written documentation and associated documents in a secure and confidential location.
  8. Promptly notify the individual who reported and the individual(s) about whom the complaint was made of the final determination and implement any corrective actions identified in the written document.
  9. Inform the individual who reported of the right to file a complaint or charge externally as outlined in the next section.

## V. Legal Protections and External Remedies

Sexual harassment is not only prohibited by B&ECPL but is also prohibited by state, federal, and, where applicable, local law.

Aside from the internal process at B&ECPL, employees may also choose to pursue legal remedies with the following governmental entities. While a private attorney is not required to file a complaint with a governmental agency, you may seek the legal advice of an attorney.

### A. State Human Rights Law (HRL)

The Human Rights Law (HRL), codified as N.Y. Executive Law, Art. 15, § 290, et seq., applies to all employers in New York State with regard to sexual harassment, and protects employees, paid or unpaid interns, and non-employees, regardless of immigration status. A complaint alleging violation of the Human Rights Law may be filed either with the Division of Human Rights (DHR) or in New York State Supreme Court.

Effective August 12, 2020, complaints may be filed with the DHR any time **within 3 years** of the harassment. If an individual did not file at DHR, they can sue directly in state court under the HRL, **within three years** of the alleged sexual harassment. An individual may not file with DHR if they have already filed a HRL complaint in state court.

Complaining internally to B&ECPL does not extend your time to file with DHR or in court. The one year or three years is counted from date of the most recent incident of harassment.

You do not need an attorney to file a complaint with DHR, and there is no cost to file with DHR.

DHR will investigate your complaint and determine whether there is probable cause to believe that sexual harassment has occurred. Probable cause cases are forwarded to a public hearing before an administrative law judge. If sexual harassment is found after a hearing, DHR has the power to award relief, which varies but may include requiring your employer to take action to stop the harassment, or redress the damage caused, including paying of monetary damages, attorney's fees and civil fines.

DHR's main office contact information is: NYS Division of Human Rights, Main Place Tower, 350 Main Street 10<sup>th</sup> Fl. Suite 1000B, Buffalo, New York 14202. You may call (716) 847-7632 or visit: [www.dhr.ny.gov](http://www.dhr.ny.gov) or you can call DHR's toll-free sexual harassment hotline at 1-800-HARASS-3 Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

Contact DHR at (888) 392-3644 or visit [dhr.ny.gov/complaint](http://dhr.ny.gov/complaint) for more information about filing a complaint. The website has a complaint form that can be downloaded, filled out, notarized and mailed to DHR. The website also contains contact information for DHR's regional offices across New York State.

#### B. Civil Rights Act of 1964

The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces federal anti-discrimination laws, including Title VII of the 1964 federal Civil Rights Act (codified as 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq.). An individual can file a complaint with the EEOC anytime within 300 days from the harassment. There is no cost to file a complaint with the EEOC. The EEOC will investigate the complaint, and determine whether there is reasonable cause to believe that discrimination has occurred, at which point the EEOC will issue a Right to Sue letter permitting the individual to file a complaint in federal court.

The EEOC does not hold hearings or award relief, but may take other action including pursuing cases in federal court on behalf of complaining parties. Federal courts may award remedies if discrimination is found to have occurred. In general, private employers must have at least 15 employees to come within the jurisdiction of the EEOC.

An employee alleging discrimination at work can file a "Charge of Discrimination." The EEOC has district, area, and field offices where complaints can be filed. Contact the EEOC by calling 1-800-669-4000 (TTY: 1-800-669-6820), visiting their website at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) or via email at [info@eeoc.gov](mailto:info@eeoc.gov).



If an individual filed an administrative complaint with DHR, DHR will file the complaint with the EEOC to preserve the right to proceed in federal court.

C. Local Protections

Many localities enforce laws protecting individuals from sexual harassment and discrimination. An individual should contact the county, city or town in which they live to find out if such a law exists.

D. Contact the Local Police Department

If the harassment involves unwanted physical touching, coerced physical confinement or coerced sex acts, the conduct may constitute a crime. Contact the local police department.

Adopted December 20, 2018 per Resolution 2018-41.  
Amended November 21, 2019 per Resolution 2019-44.  
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Amended July 20, 2023 per Resolution 2023-21.  
Reviewed by Board of Trustees July 18, 2024 - no changes.



## COMPLAINT OF HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, OR RETALIATION

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The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library prohibits harassment or discrimination because of gender, race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, creed, age, disability, familial status, marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, military status, genetic predisposition, arrest or conviction status, domestic violence victim status, known relationship or association with member of a protected class, or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law. The B&ECPL acknowledges its legal and ethical obligation to protect the right of all persons to an environment free from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. If you believe you have been harassed, discriminated against, or retaliated against in violation of B&ECPL policy, please complete this complaint form.

### General Information:

<b>Date:</b>		
<b>Name:</b>		
<b>Address:</b>		
<b>City:</b>	<b>State:</b>	<b>Zip:</b>
<b>Home Phone No.:</b>	<b>Work Phone No.:</b>	
<b>Department:</b>		
<b>Supervisor's Name:</b>		
<b>Supervisor's Phone No.:</b>		

**Specific Information about Your Complaint:**

**1. WHO IS HARASSING YOU, DISCRIMINATING AGAINST YOU, AND/OR RETALIATING AGAINST YOU? (Include name(s) and job title(s))**

**2. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU TO PROMPT THIS COMPLAINT? (Be as specific as possible in describing the harassment/discrimination/retaliation. Include names, dates, and locations. Try to describe the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of the incident(s).)**

**3. DID ANYONE WITNESS THE INCIDENT(S) DESCRIBED ABOVE? IF SO, STATE THE NAME OF THE INDIVIDUAL WHO WITNESSED EACH INCIDENT.**

**4. WITH WHOM (if anyone) HAVE YOU DISCUSSED THE INCIDENT(S)?**

**5. HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY BEEN SUBJECTED TO HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, OR RETALIATION BY THE INDIVIDUALS IDENTIFIED IN YOUR RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1? IF SO, PLEASE DESCRIBE EACH PRIOR INCIDENT IN DETAIL. (Include names, dates, and locations. Try to describe the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of the incident(s).)**

**6. DO YOU HAVE WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION (e.g. cards, letters, text messages, or journals) RELEVANT TO YOUR COMPLAINT? IF SO, DESCRIBE THE DOCUMENT(S).**

**7. ARE YOU AWARE OF OTHER PERSONS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, OR RETALIATION BY THE PERSON HARASSING, DISCRIMINATING, OR RETALIATING AGAINST YOU? IF SO, STATE THE NAME AND THE DETAILS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES, IF KNOWN TO YOU.**

**8. HOW DO YOU SUGGEST OR PREFER THAT YOUR COMPLAINT BE RESOLVED?**