



THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations Subcommittee on Finance and Tax
Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government
Commerce and Tourism
Community Affairs
Ethics and Elections
Appropriations Subcommittee on Civil and Criminal Justice
Rules

SENATOR JOSE JAVIER RODRIGUEZ

Deputy Democratic Whip
37th District

November 6, 2017

Senator Joe Negron
President, Florida Senate
409 The Capitol
404 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100
Sent via email to Negron.joe@flsenate.gov

President Negron,

Following allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct by Senator Latvala, I write in an effort to propose more aggressive changes in policies and practices than have so far been considered by this Legislature. Those who work at or visit The Capitol should feel safe from harassment, discrimination, objectification and the abuse of power imbalances.

The Senate's policy changes of October 27, 2017, requiring all complaints to go through either the Senate President's office or the complainant's supervisor, were severely misguided and I applaud your efforts to remedy the same in the days following. I also applaud the coming appointment of an independent investigator into the allegations against Senator Latvala. However, I do not believe this response is enough.

We must do more. Our legislature should be governed by standards at least as rigorous as other large public and private institutions or, I believe, by higher standards. Concrete steps the Senate can and should take include:

1. The Senate should immediately implement an outreach program to call or visit all Senate offices – and make these resources available to those who work at the Capitol but are not State employees – to ask if any victims wish to come forward about harassment from members, staff, or lobbyists, and to communicate a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment. The Senate should also immediately make available mental health counselors for victims and others affected by sexual harassment incidents.

REPLY TO:

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- 220 Senate Office Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100 (850) 487-5037

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JOE NEGRON
President of the Senate

ANITERE FLORES
President Pro Tempore

2. The Senate should amend the Rules to specifically define and address sexual harassment to make clear that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. Senate rules contain no mention of the words “sexual harassment,” contrasted with House rules that do address sexual harassment and other forms of harassment. The Senate must spell out clear policies against harassment and make known the consequences of violations for harassers. The Senate should also state in unequivocal terms that retaliation for complaints will not be tolerated.
3. Senate Rule 1.43 regarding ethics violations and the process for dealing with them should be amended to specifically include references to sexual harassment, retaliation and penalties triggered by findings that either occurred. That may include creating an automatic independent review of allegations outside of the Senate. No expense should be spared with matters this serious.
4. The Senate should change and immediately implement training policies to specifically address and include sexual harassment. Currently, there is very little in training addressing sexual harassment. At minimum, added to our legislator ethics training that occurs in odd-numbered years the Senate should require harassment awareness training that covers discrimination of all kinds (gender, sexual, sexual orientation, ethnic, etc.). The training should be implemented immediately to provide much needed education, to communicate the zero tolerance policy and to explain the process of making a harassment claim, including the subsequent steps in an investigation, anti-retaliation protections and the right of witnesses to report the harassment.

It is my hope the Senate takes more dramatic action to remedy the situation and swiftly replace the culture of complacency with the bar you have set of zero tolerance. Findings of harassment and discrimination should be accompanied by appropriate action to hold harassers to account. The Capitol must be a safe place to work and visit where victims and witnesses are able to come forward without fear of intimidation or reprisal.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions. I look forward to working with you on them.

Regards,



Senator José Javier Rodríguez
District 37, Miami

CC: Chairman Lizbeth Benacquisto, Senate Committee on Rules
Senator Oscar Braynon, Senate Democratic Leader
Cheri Vancura, Chief of Staff to President Negron