



WOMEN IN FILM & VIDEO OF WASHINGTON, DC

Sexual Harassment: Information and Resources

Women in Film & Video of Washington, DC (WIFV) provides our members with information about legal issues of interest and import. Below is information relating to sexual harassment laws and enforcement, including links to the abundant (and free) resources available from federal, state, and county agencies in the DMV Metro Area.

On the federal level, [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) prohibits employment discrimination against employees and applicants based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Sexual harassment can take the form of “quid pro quo” harassment, where someone is denied employment, promotion, or other employment benefits because he or she refused to submit to unwelcome sexual advances or demands. Sexual harassment can also take the form of a hostile work environment, marked by unwelcome comments or conduct based on sex that are so severe or pervasive as to unreasonably interfere with work performance or create an intimidating, abusive, hostile or offensive work environment.

Federal law also prohibits employers from retaliating against employees for engaging in certain “protected activity,” such as opposing unlawful employment practices or participating in efforts to investigate and enforce the laws prohibiting such practices.

Title VII applies to private, state government, and local government employers that employ 15 or more employees, as well as federal government employees and applicants for federal employment.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces federal laws that prohibit employment discrimination based on a [variety of protected classes](#), including sex. You can [enter your zip code](#) to find the EEOC field office that handles your area, or call the EEOC headquarters at **(202) 663-4900**.

The EEOC’s website contains basic information on [what to do if you believe you have been harassed at work](#). The EEOC also explains [how to file a charge of discrimination](#); lists the important [time limits](#) that apply to filing charges; provides [facts about sexual harassment](#); and offers exhaustive details on enforcing [retaliation](#) laws.

The EEOC website is also a [resource for small business owners](#) who want to understand which federal laws apply to them, how to prevent discrimination, and how to respond to a charge of discrimination. Moreover, the EEOC's Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace identifies [promising practices for preventing harassment](#), including: (1) committed and engaged leadership; (2) consistent and demonstrated accountability; (3) strong and comprehensive harassment policies; (4) trusted and accessible complaint procedures; and (5) regular, interactive training tailored to the audience and the organization.

In addition to federal law, state and local laws provide further (and sometimes greater) protection for individuals who have experienced employment discrimination based on sex.

For example, the [District of Columbia Human Rights Act](#) prohibits sexual discrimination, which extends to discrimination based on pregnancy, childbirth, related medical conditions, breastfeeding, or reproductive health decisions. The D.C. Office of Human Rights can be reached at **(202) 727-4559**, and provides detailed [procedures for filing a complaint](#) under the D.C. Human Rights Act.

Similarly, the [Virginia Human Rights Act](#) prohibits any conduct "that violates any Virginia or federal statute or regulation governing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, age, marital status, or disability." More information is available at [Virginia's Division of Human Rights](#) (DHR), which is based in Richmond and can be reached at **(804) 225-2292**. The DHR explains its role and jurisdictional limits as follows:

Complaints alleging discrimination by an employer with six to fourteen (6-14) employees fall under state jurisdiction, while employers with 15 or more (20 or more if an age discrimination complaint) fall under federal jurisdiction, which includes discriminatory termination from employment as well as hostile environments and equal pay issues. The DHR participates in a work-share agreement with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to investigate and make determinations with regard to alleged violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related civil rights laws.

Some cities and counties in Virginia also have human rights laws, as well as commissions to enforce those laws, including the following:

- [City of Alexandria Office of Human Rights](#);
- [Arlington County Human Rights Commission](#);
- [Fairfax County Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs](#);
- [Prince William County Human Rights Office](#).

The [Maryland Commission on Civil Rights](#) (MCCR) enforces Maryland's laws against discrimination in, among other areas, employment. The MCCR has an office in Baltimore, and can be reached at **(410) 767-8600**. As the MCCR explains, "every Marylander is guaranteed equal opportunity in receiving employment and in all labor management-union relations regardless of race, color, religion, ancestry or national origin, sex, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or genetic information . . . Harassment on the basis of a protected class (above, such as sexual harassment), and retaliation for filing a complaint or being involved in the investigation are both prohibited under law and enforced by MCCR." The MCCR provides an online form to [initiate an inquiry](#) into discriminatory behavior.

Maryland counties also offer guidance and enforcement services. For example, the [Montgomery County Office of Human Rights](#) accepts complaints and enforces the Maryland County Code, which prohibits "illegal discrimination that is based on race, color, religion, ancestry, sex, age, national origin, marital status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, genetic status, family responsibilities, gender identity, and (in housing only) source of income and presence of children."

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