

DOJ Sends Strong Message Against Sexual Harassment in the Public Sector

PUBLISHED ON

August 24, 2018

A U.S. Department of Justice lawsuit against a Michigan education agency should serve as a warning to all public sector employers of the DOJ's resolve in enforcing a new initiative to eliminate sexual harassment in state and local government workplaces.

Earlier this month, the [DOJ filed suit](#) against the Allegan Area Educational Service Agency in connection with the sexual harassment of two female employees.

Their claims involved inappropriate behavior by the former principal at the school where all three worked. The harassment started as verbal abuse but escalated to physical assaults. The principal was later convicted of criminal assault.

The DOJ lawsuit charges that the education agency didn't do enough to prevent the harassment.

The lawsuit is part of the department's new Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Initiative it [announced in February](#). According to a news release, the initiative is aimed at eradicating sexual harassment in state and local government workplaces. It focuses on litigation, outreach, and development of effective remedial measures to address and prevent sexual harassment and hostile work environments in violation of [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#).

Public sector employers such as school districts, intermediate units and local government agencies could be subject to a similar DOJ lawsuit. This lawsuit should serve as a timely reminder to public employers that the department intends to actively enforce its workplace initiative against sexual harassment in the public sector. Now is the time to review policies to ensure proper procedures for reporting and investigating allegations of unlawful sexual harassment, to assess employee morale and workplace culture for warning signs of unlawful conduct, and to renew and revisit necessary employee and supervisor training.

Any employer with questions about sexual harassment in the workplace can contact anyone in either [Barley Snyder's Employment Practice Group](#) or [Education Practice Group](#). The firm also has conducted on-site sexual harassment elimination training for interested employers.