



TRAINING FOCUS

THE NEED FOR CIVILITY ON CAPITOL HILL

The legislative branch has a diverse workforce with a complex range of needs. There are thousands of employees who work in a variety of professional positions, from economists at the Congressional Budget Office to policy analysts in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. There are also positions with more intense physical demands such as the U.S. Capitol Police or skilled tradesmen working for the Architect of the Capitol.

WORKPLACE STRESS IN THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Most positions in the legislative branch, no matter the classification, have an added layer of complexity given the nature of the work performed on Capitol Hill. The U.S. Capitol Police must maintain safety and security for Members, employees, and visitors in an era of increased threats towards Congress. Staff at the Architect of the Capitol are charged with preserving buildings that are hundreds of years old and visited by millions of people every year.

**"THIS FOLLOWS A GROWING
TREND IN TRAINING ...THAT
FOCUSES ON CIVILITY RATHER
THAN LEGAL DEFINITIONS AND
REQUIREMENTS EXCLUSIVELY."**

Congressional staff also work in extremely high-stress environments. They work long hours on complex substantive issues in a politically charged environment. There are also often significant age and power disparities between legislative office leadership and lower level positions. These factors can lead to office environments that are susceptible to conflict and hostility.

TRAINING STAFF ON THEIR RIGHTS

The Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 (CAA) provides workplace protections for the legislative branch's 30,000 employees. This includes prohibiting discrimination and harassment, family and medical leave, fair labor standards, and occupational safety and health standards to name a few. Until recently, legislative branch employing offices were not required to train staff on their workplace rights.

On November 9, 2017, the Senate passed Senate Resolution 330, which requires all Members and staff, including interns, fellows, and detailees, to take workplace harassment training each Congress. On November 29, 2017, the House passed a similar resolution requiring Members and employees to routinely complete training on workplace rights and responsibilities.



EMPHASIZING CIVILITY VS. LEGALESE

The implementing regulations for House Resolution 630 required that its training cover “creating a more civil workplace” in addition to preventing, harassment, discrimination and retaliation. This follows a growing trend in training on protections from harassment and discrimination in the workplace that focuses on civility rather than legal definitions and requirements exclusively. The Office of Compliance (OOC), which is responsible for educating legislative branch employees on their rights under the CAA, also follows this model in its own trainings, specifically tailored to the needs of legislative branch staff. This includes providing an introduction to the CAA and its applicable laws and the behaviors that can promote a positive or toxic work environment. The training also focuses on factors that can put offices at increased risk for workplace misconduct, which are illustrated by examples for trainees to debate. An important tool for preventing misconduct in the workplace, particularly in stressful environments, is to have policies and procedures in place to expediently address any issues.

The OOC administers a dispute resolution program for legislative branch employees who can file formal requests for counseling if they feel the law has been violated. The OOC’s training acknowledges that every workplace dispute will not rise to this level and provides managers and staff practical tips on how to handle these issues internally by developing and following office standards of conduct and anti-discrimination and harassment policies. These policies need to be consistently enforced and routinely communicated to staff so they have tools readily available to handle workplace disputes. Although it is considered an incredible privilege to work in the legislative branch, the nature of the work comes with intense pressure that can lead to conflict. Staff must be given the skills they need to prevent misconduct and quickly address it if it arises.

The OOC is committed to providing legislative branch offices the necessary training to accomplish this goal. Contact the Office of Compliance at 202-724-9250 or by email at ooctraining@compliance.com for more information.