

VESTAL FIRE DISTRICT

Sexual Harassment and Other Harassment Prevention Policy

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Policy:	Sexual Harassment and Other Harassment Prevention Policy ¹
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Cross-reference:	

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Harassment and more specifically sexual harassment is a form of illegal discrimination and is a violation of state and federal civil rights laws. It is the policy of the Vestal Fire District ("Fire District") to strongly oppose and prevent any form of sexual or other harassment. The Fire District recognizes that any employee's ability to perform his or her job may be adversely affected by harassment. The Fire District is committed to maintaining a workplace free from harassment and discrimination, and to providing a work environment free of inappropriate and disrespectful conduct and communication. Consequently, in an effort to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, the Fire District's harassment policy may, in some respects, may exceed the requirements of applicable federal and state law.

Sexual harassment is a form of workplace discrimination that subjects an employee to inferior conditions of employment due to their gender, gender identity, gender expression (perceived or actual), and/or sexual orientation. Sexual harassment is often viewed simply as a form of gender-based discrimination, but the Fire District recognizes that discrimination can be related to or affected by other identities beyond gender. Under the New York State Human Rights Law, it is illegal to discriminate based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, race, creed, color, national origin, military status, disability, predisposing genetic characteristics, familial status, marital status, criminal history, or status as a victim of domestic violence. Our different identities impact our understanding of the world and how others perceive us. For example, an individual's race, ability, or immigration status may impact their experience with gender discrimination in the workplace.

While this policy is primarily focused on sexual harassment and gender discrimination, the methods for reporting and investigating discrimination based on other protected identities and other forms of harassment are the same. Specific references to "sexual harassment" used in the Policy should be deemed applicable to all forms of harassment or discrimination where applicable. The purpose of this policy is to teach employees to recognize discrimination, including discrimination based on an individual's intersecting identities, and other forms of harassment, and to provide the tools to take action when they occur.

¹ This policy is based on and includes all of the elements of the NYS Model Policy released in June 2023, and, as stated in such Model Policy, it "is a template that can be used by employers to meet the New York State Labor Law requirements for a sexual harassment prevention policy. Employers are encouraged to tailor this policy to their individual needs, though as the minimum standard, no section in this policy should be omitted. The list of examples provided in this model policy is not meant to be exhaustive." Based on such directives, this Policy incorporates all sections of the Model Policy and has been modified to meet the needs of this specific Employer.

All members, employees, commissioners, firematic officers (who act as the equivalent of managers and supervisors), and all other Fire District personnel, whether publicly elected, appointed, paid, or volunteer, are required to work in a manner designed to prevent sexual harassment, harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. Firematic officers include the Fire Chief, the assistant or deputy fire chiefs, captains, lieutenants, and other appointed or elected fire officers (hereinafter “fire officer” or “fire officers”).

This Policy is one component of the Fire District’s commitment to maintaining a discrimination-free work environment.

STATEMENT OF GOALS

Sexual harassment, harassment, discrimination, and retaliation are against the law and are prohibited by the Vestal Fire District.

After reading this policy, employees, volunteer members, commissioners, fire officers, and other covered individuals will understand their right to a workplace free from sexual and other harassment. Employees will also learn what harassment and discrimination look like, what actions they can take to prevent and report harassment, and how they are protected from retaliation after taking action.

This policy will also explain the procedures for reporting, investigating, and resolving complaints of harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. Employees are encouraged to report sexual harassment, harassment, or discrimination by filing a complaint internally with the Fire District.

Employees may also file a complaint with a government agency or in court under applicable federal, state, or local anti-discrimination laws. To file a complaint with the New York State Division of Human Rights, please visit <https://dhr.ny.gov/complaint>. To file a complaint with the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, please visit <https://www.eeoc.gov/filing-charge-discrimination>.

The Vestal Fire District is committed to maintaining a workplace free from harassment, discrimination, and retaliation, and to taking prompt and appropriate action whenever such conduct is reported or otherwise becomes known.

A. POLICY

1. Pursuant to New York law, the Fire District equates volunteer membership with employment. For purposes of this policy only, the terms “officer” or “officers” shall refer to commissioners, fire officers of the Fire District, or others acting in a supervisory or management title or functional equivalent.
2. This Fire District Policy applies to all employees, fire officers, volunteers, publicly elected or appointed Fire District officers and officials, applicants for employment, and interns, whether paid or unpaid.
3. This Policy also applies to additional covered individuals. It applies to anyone who is (or is employed by) a contractor, subcontractor, vendor, consultant, or anyone providing services in the workplace. These individuals include persons commonly referred to as independent contractors, gig workers, and temporary workers. Also included are persons providing equipment repair, cleaning services, or any other services through a contract with the Fire District. For the remainder of this policy, the term “covered individual” is used to refer to these

individuals who are not direct employees of the Fire District.

4. Sexual harassment is unacceptable. Any employee or covered individual who engages in sexual harassment, discrimination, or retaliation will be subject to action, including appropriate discipline for employees.
5. In New York, harassment does not need to be severe or pervasive to be illegal.
6. Employees and covered individuals should not feel discouraged from reporting harassment because they do not believe it is bad enough, or conversely, because they do not want to see a colleague fired over less severe behavior. Just as harassment can happen in different degrees, potential discipline for engaging in sexual harassment will depend on the degree of harassment and might include education and counseling. It may lead to suspension or termination when appropriate.
7. Retaliation is prohibited. Any employee or covered individual who reports an incident of sexual harassment or discrimination, provides information, or otherwise assists in any investigation of a sexual harassment, harassment, or discrimination complaint is protected from retaliation. No one should fear reporting sexual harassment or other harassment if they believe it has occurred. So long as a person reasonably believes that they have witnessed or experienced such behavior, they are protected from retaliation.
8. Any employee of the Fire District who retaliates against anyone involved in a sexual harassment, harassment, or discrimination investigation will face disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
9. All employees and covered individuals working in the workplace who believe they have been subject to such retaliation should inform the Fire Chief or any other fire officer. All employees and covered individuals who believe they have been a target of such retaliation may also seek relief from government agencies, as explained below in the section on Legal Protections.
10. Discrimination of any kind, including sexual harassment, is a violation of Fire District policy, is unlawful, and may subject the Fire District to liability for the harm experienced by targets of discrimination. Harassers may also be individually subject to liability, and employers or officers who fail to report or act on harassment may be liable for aiding and abetting such behavior. Employees at every level who engage in harassment or discrimination, including officers who engage in harassment or discrimination or who allow such behavior to continue, will be penalized for such misconduct.
11. The Fire District will conduct a prompt and thorough investigation that is fair to all parties. An investigation will occur whenever the Fire Chief or another officer receives a complaint about discrimination, sexual harassment, or other harassment, or when the Fire Chief or an officer otherwise knows of possible discrimination, sexual harassment, or other harassment occurring.
12. To the fullest extent possible, the Fire District will endeavor to keep the investigation confidential. If an investigation ends with the finding that discrimination, sexual harassment, or other harassment occurred, the Fire District will act as required. In addition to any required discipline, the Fire District will also take steps to ensure a safe work environment for the employee(s) who

experienced the discrimination or harassment.

13. All employees, including officers, are required to cooperate with any internal investigation of discrimination, sexual harassment, or other harassment.
14. All employees and covered individuals are encouraged to report any harassment or behaviors that violate this policy. All employees will have access to a complaint form to report harassment and file complaints. Use of this form is not required, but is encouraged to assist in the investigation. For anyone who would rather make a complaint verbally or by email, these complaints will be treated with equal priority. An employee or covered individual who prefers not to report harassment to the Fire Chief or an officer may instead report harassment to the New York State Division of Human Rights and/or the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Complaints may be made to both the employer and a government agency.
15. The Fire Chief and officers are required to report any complaint that they receive, or any harassment that they observe or become aware of, to the Board of Fire Commissioners.
16. This Policy applies to all employees and covered individuals, such as contractors, subcontractors, vendors, consultants, or anyone providing services in the workplace, and all must follow and uphold this Policy.
17. This Policy applies to all Fire District and Fire Department activities, including but not limited to emergency responses, training activities, drills, meetings, inspections, public events, conferences, conventions, social functions, District-sponsored events, mutual aid activities, and any other activity conducted under the authority of or in connection with the Fire District or Fire Department. This Policy also applies to conduct occurring through electronic communications, social media, text messages, email, virtual meetings, and other forms of communication when such conduct affects the workplace or Fire District operations.
18. This policy must be provided to all employees in person or digitally through email upon hiring and will be posted prominently in all work locations. For offices operating remotely, the policy will be sent via email and made available on the organization's shared network.
19. All employees, volunteer members, Fire District officers, Fire Department officers, and other covered individuals shall receive sexual harassment prevention training in accordance with New York State Labor Law requirements and any additional training requirements established by the Fire District.

B. WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

1. Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based discrimination that 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. Sexual harassment is not limited to sexual contact, touching, or expressions of a sexually suggestive nature. Sexual harassment includes all forms of gender discrimination, including gender role stereotyping and treating employees differently because of their gender.

2. Understanding gender diversity is essential to recognizing sexual harassment because discrimination based on sex stereotypes, gender expression, and perceived identity are all forms of sexual harassment. The gender spectrum is nuanced, but the three most common ways people identify are cisgender, transgender, and non-binary. A cisgender person is someone whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. Generally, this gender will align with the binary of male or female. A transgender person is someone whose gender is different than the sex they were assigned at birth. A non-binary person does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. They might identify as both, somewhere in between, or completely outside the gender binary. Some may identify as transgender, but not all do. Respecting an individual's gender identity is a necessary first step in establishing a safe workplace.
3. Sexual harassment is unlawful when it subjects an individual to inferior terms, conditions, or privileges of employment.
4. Harassment does not need to be severe or pervasive to be illegal. It can be any harassing behavior that rises above petty slights or trivial inconveniences. Every instance of harassment is unique to those experiencing it, and there is no single boundary between petty slights and harassing behavior. However, the Human Rights Law specifies that whether harassing conduct is considered petty or trivial is to be viewed from the standpoint of a reasonable victim of discrimination with the same protected characteristics. Generally, any behavior in which an employee or covered individual is treated worse because of their gender (perceived or actual), sexual orientation, or gender expression is considered a violation of the Fire District's Policy.
5. The intent of the behavior, for example, making a joke, does not neutralize a harassment claim. Not intending to harass is not a defense. The impact of the behavior on a person is what counts. Sexual harassment includes any unwelcome conduct which is either directed at an individual because of that individual's gender identity or expression (perceived or actual), or is of a sexual nature when:
 - a. The purpose or effect of this behavior unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. The impacted person does not need to be the intended target of the sexual harassment;
 - b. Employment depends implicitly or explicitly on accepting such unwelcome behavior; or
 - c. Decisions regarding an individual's employment are based on an individual's acceptance to or rejection of such behavior. Such decisions can include what shifts and how many hours an employee might work, project assignments, as well as salary and promotion decisions.
6. There are two main types of sexual harassment:
 - a. Behaviors that contribute to a hostile work environment include, but are 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, gender identity, or gender expression. Sexual

harassment also consists of any unwanted verbal or physical advances, sexually explicit, derogatory, or discriminatory statements which an employee finds offensive or objectionable, causes an employee discomfort or humiliation, or interferes with the employee's job performance.

- b. 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.
- 7. Any employee or covered individual who feels harassed is encouraged to report the behavior so that any violation of this Policy can be corrected promptly. Any harassing conduct, even a single incident, can be discrimination and is covered by this Policy.
- 8. Examples Of Sexual Harassment:

The following describes some of the types of acts that may be unlawful sexual harassment and that are strictly prohibited. This list is just a sample of behaviors and should not be considered exhaustive. Any employee who believes they have experienced sexual harassment, even if it does not appear on this list, should feel encouraged to report it:

- a. Physical acts of a sexual nature, such as:
 - i. Touching, pinching, patting, kissing, hugging, grabbing, brushing against another employee's body, or poking another employee's body; or
 - ii. Rape, sexual battery, molestation, or attempts to commit these assaults, which may be considered criminal conduct outside the scope of this policy (please contact local law enforcement if you wish to pursue criminal charges).
- b. Unwanted sexual comments, advances, or propositions, such as:
 - i. Requests for sexual favors accompanied by implied or overt threats concerning the target's job performance evaluation, a promotion, or other job benefits;
 - This can include sexual advances/pressure placed on a service industry employee by customers or clients, especially those industries where hospitality and tips are essential to the customer/employee relationship;
 - ii. Subtle or obvious pressure for unwelcome sexual activities; or
 - iii. Repeated requests for dates or romantic gestures, including gift-giving.
- c. Sexually oriented gestures, noises, remarks or jokes, or questions and comments about a person's sexuality, sexual experience, or romantic history which create a hostile work environment. This is not limited to interactions in person. Remarks made over virtual platforms and in messaging apps when employees are working remotely can create a similarly hostile work environment.
- d. Sex stereotyping, which occurs when someone's conduct or personality traits

are judged based on other people's ideas or perceptions about how individuals of a particular sex should act or look:

- i. Remarks regarding an employee's gender expression, such as wearing a garment typically associated with a different gender identity; or
 - ii. Asking employees to take on traditionally gendered roles, such as asking a woman to serve meeting refreshments when it is not part of, or appropriate to, her job duties.
- e. Sexual or discriminatory displays or publications anywhere in the workplace, such as:
- i. 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;
 - ii. This also extends to the virtual or remote workspace and can include having such materials visible in the background of one's home during a virtual meeting.
- f. Hostile actions taken against an individual because of that individual's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, such as:
- i. Interfering with, destroying, or damaging a person's workstation, tools or equipment, or otherwise interfering with the individual's ability to perform the job;
 - ii. Sabotaging an individual's work;
 - iii. Bullying, yelling, or name-calling;
 - iv. Intentional misuse of an individual's preferred pronouns; or
 - v. Creating different expectations for individuals based on their perceived identities:
 - Dress codes that place more emphasis on women's attire;
 - Leaving parents/caregivers out of meetings.
9. Who Can Be a Target of Sexual Harassment?
- a. Sexual harassment can occur between any individuals, regardless of their sex or gender. Harassment does not have to be between members of the opposite sex or gender.
 - b. New York Law protects employees and all covered individuals described earlier in this Policy. Harassers can be anyone in the workplace. A supervisor, a supervisee, an officer, or a coworker can all be harassers. Anyone else in the workplace can also be a harasser, including an independent contractor, contract worker, vendor, client, customer, patient, constituent, or visitor.
 - c. Sexual harassment does not happen in a vacuum, and discrimination experienced by an employee can be impacted by biases and identities beyond an individual's gender. For example:

- i. Placing different demands or expectations on black women employees than white women employees can be both racial and gender discrimination
 - ii. An individual's immigration status may lead to perceptions of vulnerability and increased concerns around illegal retaliation for reporting sexual harassment; or
 - iii. Past experiences as a survivor of domestic or sexual violence may lead an individual to feel re-traumatized by someone's behaviors in the workplace.
 - d. Individuals bring personal history with them to the workplace that might impact how they interact with certain behaviors. It is especially important for all employees to be aware of how words or actions might impact someone with a different experience than their own in the interest of creating a safe and equitable workplace.
10. Where Can Sexual Harassment Occur?
- a. Unlawful sexual harassment is not limited to the physical workplace itself. It can occur while employees are traveling for business or at employer or industry-sponsored events or parties. Calls, texts, emails, and social media usage by employees or covered individuals can constitute unlawful workplace harassment, even if they occur away from the workplace premises, on personal devices, or during non-work hours.
 - b. Sexual harassment can occur when employees are working remotely from home as well. Any behaviors outlined above that leave an employee feeling uncomfortable, humiliated, or unable to meet their job requirements constitute harassment, even if the employee or covered individual is at home when the harassment occurs. Harassment can happen on virtual meeting platforms, in messaging apps, and after working hours between personal cell phones.

C. RETALIATION

- 1. Retaliation is unlawful and is any action by an employer or supervisor that punishes an individual upon learning of a harassment claim, that seeks to discourage a worker or covered individual from making a formal complaint or supporting a sexual harassment or discrimination claim, or that punishes those who have come forward. These actions need not be job-related or occur in the workplace to constitute unlawful retaliation. For example, threats of physical violence outside of work hours or disparaging someone on social media would be covered as retaliation under this policy.
- 2. Examples of retaliation may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Demotion, termination, denying accommodations, reduced hours, or the assignment of less desirable shifts;
 - b. Publicly releasing personnel files;
 - c. Refusing to provide a reference or providing an unwarranted negative reference;

- d. Labeling an employee as “difficult” and excluding them from projects to avoid “drama”;
 - e. Undermining an individual’s immigration status; or
 - f. Reducing work responsibilities, passing over for a promotion, or moving an individual’s desk to a less desirable office location.
- 3. Such retaliation is unlawful under federal, state, and (where applicable) local law. The New York State Human Rights Law protects any individual who has engaged in “protected activity.” Protected activity occurs when a person has:
 - a. Made a complaint of sexual harassment or discrimination, either internally or with any government agency;
 - b. Testified or assisted in a proceeding involving sexual harassment or discrimination under the Human Rights Law or any other anti-discrimination law;
 - c. Opposed sexual harassment or discrimination by making a verbal or informal complaint to management, or by simply informing a supervisor or officer of suspected harassment;
 - d. Reported that another employee has been sexually harassed or discriminated against; or
 - e. Encouraged a fellow employee to report harassment.
- 4. 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.

D. REPORTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- 1. Everyone must work toward preventing sexual harassment, but leadership matters. Officers have a special responsibility to make sure employees feel safe at work and that workplaces are free from harassment and discrimination.
- 2. Any employee or covered individual is encouraged to report harassing or discriminatory behavior to the Fire Chief or an officer. Anyone who witnesses or becomes aware of potential instances of sexual harassment should report such behavior to the Fire Chief or a fire officer.
- 3. Reports of sexual harassment may be made verbally or in writing. A written complaint form is attached to this policy if an employee would like to use it, but use of this complaint form is not mandatory. Employees who are reporting sexual harassment on behalf of other employees may use the complaint form and should note that it is on another employee’s behalf. A verbal or otherwise written complaint (such as an email) on behalf of oneself or another employee is also acceptable.
- 4. Employees and covered individuals who believe they have been a target of sexual harassment may at any time seek assistance in additional available forums, as explained below in the section on Legal Protections.
- 5. Any employee, volunteer member, covered individual, or other person who

wishes to report harassment, discrimination, or retaliation involving the Fire Chief may report the complaint directly to the Chairperson of the Board of Fire Commissioners.

6. Any employee, volunteer member, covered individual, or other person who wishes to report harassment, discrimination, or retaliation involving a member of the Board of Fire Commissioners may report the complaint to any other member of the Board of Fire Commissioners who is not involved in the incident.

E. FIRE CHIEF AND OFFICER SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The Fire Chief and officers have a responsibility to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination. The Fire Chief and officers who receive a complaint or information about suspected sexual harassment, observe what may be sexually harassing or discriminatory behavior, or for any reason suspect that sexual harassment or discrimination is occurring, are required to report such suspected sexual harassment, in the case of a fire officer, to the Fire Chief, and in the case of the Fire Chief, to the Board of Fire Commissioners. Officers and supervisors should not be passive and wait for an employee to make a claim of harassment. If they observe such behavior, they must act.
2. The Fire Chief and officers can be disciplined if they engage in sexually harassing or discriminatory behavior themselves. The Fire Chief and officers can also be disciplined for failing to report suspected sexual harassment or allowing sexual harassment to continue after they know about it.
3. The Fire Chief and officers will also be subject to discipline for engaging in any retaliation.
4. While the Fire Chief and officers have a responsibility to report harassment and discrimination, the Fire Chief and officers must be mindful of the impact that harassment and a subsequent investigation have on victims. Being identified as a possible victim of harassment and questioned about harassment and discrimination can be intimidating, uncomfortable, and re-traumatizing for individuals. The Fire Chief and officers must accommodate the needs of individuals who have experienced harassment to ensure the workplace is safe, supportive, and free from retaliation for them during and after any investigation.
5. Members of the Board of Fire Commissioners shall support and enforce this Policy and shall promptly address any complaints of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation reported to them. Complaints involving the Fire Chief or a member of the Board shall be handled to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure a fair, impartial, and prompt investigation.

F. BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

1. Any employee witnessing harassment as a bystander is encouraged to report it. The Fire Chief or an officer who is a bystander to harassment is **required** to report it. There are five standard methods of bystander intervention that can be used when anyone witnesses harassment or discrimination and wants to help.
 - a. A bystander can interrupt the harassment by engaging with the individual being harassed and distracting them from the harassing behavior;

- b. A bystander who feels unsafe interrupting on their own can ask a third party to help intervene in the harassment;
 - c. A bystander can record or take notes on the harassment incident to benefit a future investigation;
 - d. A bystander might check in with the person who has been harassed after the incident, see how they are feeling, and let them know the behavior was not ok; and
 - e. If a bystander feels safe, they can confront the harassers and name the behavior as inappropriate. When confronting harassment, physically assaulting an individual is never an appropriate response.
2. Though not exhaustive, and dependent on the circumstances, the guidelines above can serve as a brief guide of how to react when witnessing harassment in the workplace. Any employee witnessing harassment as a bystander is encouraged to report it. The Fire Chief, or any fire officer who is a bystander to harassment, is required to report it.

G. COMPLAINTS AND INVESTIGATIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

1. All complaints or information about sexual harassment will be investigated, whether that information was reported in verbal or written form.
2. An investigation of any complaint, information, or knowledge of suspected sexual harassment will be prompt, thorough, and started and completed as soon as possible.
3. To the fullest extent possible, the Fire District will endeavor to keep the investigation confidential. All individuals involved, including those making a harassment claim, witnesses, and alleged harassers, deserve a fair and impartial investigation.
4. Any employee may be required to cooperate as needed in an investigation of suspected sexual harassment. The Fire District will take disciplinary action against anyone engaging in retaliation against employees who file complaints, support another's complaint, or participate in harassment investigations.
5. The Fire District recognizes that participating in a harassment investigation can be uncomfortable and has the potential to retraumatize an employee. Those receiving claims and leading investigations will handle complaints and questions with sensitivity toward those participating.
6. While the process may vary from case to case, investigations will be done in accordance with the following steps. Upon receipt of a complaint, the Fire Chief and/or the Fire Chief's designee:
 - a. Will conduct a prompt review of the allegations, assess the appropriate scope of the investigation, and take any interim actions (for example, instructing the individual(s) about whom the complaint was made to refrain from communications with the individual(s) who reported the harassment), as appropriate. If the complaint is verbal, request that the individual complete the complaint form in writing. If the person reporting prefers not to fill out the form, the Fire Chief and/or the Fire Chief's designee will prepare a complaint

form or equivalent documentation based on the verbal reporting;

- b. Will take steps to obtain, review, and preserve documents sufficient to assess the allegations, including documents, emails, or phone records that may be relevant to the investigation. The Fire Chief and/or the Fire Chief's designee will consider and implement appropriate document request, review, and preservation measures, including for electronic communications;
- c. Will seek to interview all parties involved, including any relevant witnesses;
- d. Will create a written documentation of the investigation (such as a letter, memo, or email), which contains the following:
 - i. A list of all documents reviewed, along with a detailed summary of relevant documents;
 - ii. A list of names of those interviewed, along with a detailed summary of their statements;
 - iii. A timeline of events;
 - iv. A summary of any prior relevant incidents disclosed in the investigation, reported or unreported; and
 - v. The basis for the decision and final resolution of the complaint or, when warranted by the nature and seriousness of the complaint and the result of the investigation, refer the matter to the Fire District Board of Fire Commissioners for actions pursuant to and under the authority of General Municipal Law 209-L or as otherwise provided by law, together with any corrective action(s) taken or recommended to the Board of Fire Commissioners.
- e. Will keep the written documentation and associated documents in a secure and confidential location;
- f. Will promptly notify the individual(s) who reported the harassment and the individual(s) about whom the complaint was made that the investigation has been completed and implement any corrective actions identified in the written document; and
- g. Will inform the individual(s) who reported of the right to file a complaint or charge externally as outlined in the next section.

H. LEGAL PROTECTIONS AND EXTERNAL REMEDIES

- 1. Sexual harassment is not only prohibited by the Fire District, but it is also prohibited by state, federal, and, where applicable, local law.
- 2. The internal process outlined in the policy above is one way for employees to report sexual harassment. Employees and covered individuals 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 also seek the legal advice of an attorney.

a. New York State Division of Human Rights

- i. The New York State Human Rights Law (HRL), N.Y. Executive Law, art. 15, § 290 *et seq.*, applies to all employers in New York State and protects employees and covered individuals, regardless of immigration status. A complaint alleging violation of the Human Rights Law may be filed either with the New York State Division of Human Rights (DHR) or in the New York State Supreme Court.
- ii. Complaints of sexual harassment filed with DHR may be submitted any time within three years of the harassment. If an individual does not file a complaint with DHR, they can bring a lawsuit directly in state court under the Human Rights Law, 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.
- iii. Complaining internally to the Fire District does not extend your time to file with DHR or in court. The three years are counted from the date of the most recent incident of harassment.
- iv. You do not need an attorney to file a complaint with DHR, and there is no cost to file with DHR.
- v. DHR will investigate your complaint and determine whether there is probable cause to believe that sexual harassment has occurred. Probable cause cases receive a public hearing before an administrative law judge. If sexual harassment is found at the hearing, DHR has the power to award relief. Relief varies, but it may include requiring your employer to take action to stop the harassment or repair the damage caused by the harassment, including paying monetary damages, punitive damages, attorney's fees, and civil fines.
- vi. DHR's main office contact information is: NYS Division of Human Rights, One Fordham Plaza, Fourth Floor, Bronx, New York 10458. You may call (718) 741-8400 or visit: www.dhr.ny.gov.
- vii. Go to dhr.ny.gov/complaint for more information about filing a complaint with DHR. The website has a digital complaint process that can be completed on your computer or mobile device from start to finish. The website has a complaint form that can be downloaded, filled out, and mailed to DHR, as well as a form that can be submitted online. The website also contains contact information for DHR's regional offices across New York State.
- viii. Call the DHR sexual harassment hotline at 1(800) HARASS3 for more information about filing a sexual harassment complaint. This hotline can also provide you with a referral to a volunteer attorney experienced in sexual harassment matters who can provide you with limited free assistance and counsel over the phone.

b. The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

- i. The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces federal anti-discrimination laws, including Title VII of the 1964 federal Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e *et seq.* An individual can file

a complaint with the EEOC anytime within 300 days from the most recent incident of 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. If the EEOC determines that the law may have been violated, the EEOC will try to reach a voluntary settlement with the employer. If the EEOC cannot reach a settlement, the EEOC (or the Department of Justice in certain cases) will decide whether to file a lawsuit. The EEOC will issue a Notice of Right to Sue permitting workers to file a lawsuit in federal court if the EEOC closes the charge, is unable to determine if federal employment discrimination laws may have been violated, or believes that unlawful discrimination occurred but does not file a lawsuit.

- ii. Individuals may obtain relief in mediation, settlement, or conciliation. In addition, 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.
 - iii. 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, or emailing info@eeoc.gov.
 - iv. If an individual filed an administrative complaint with the New York State Division of Human Rights, DHR will automatically file the complaint with the EEOC to preserve the right to proceed in federal court.
- c. Local Protections
- i. 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. For example, employees who work in New York City may file complaints of sexual harassment or discrimination with the New York City Commission on Human Rights. Contact their main office at Law Enforcement Bureau of the NYC Commission on Human Rights, 22 Reade Street, 1st Floor, New York, NY; call 311 or (212) 306-7450; or visit www.nyc.gov/html/cchr/html/home/home.shtml.
- d. Contact The Local Police Department
- i. If the harassment involves unwanted physical touching, coerced physical confinement, or coerced sex acts, the conduct may constitute a crime. Those wishing to pursue criminal charges are encouraged to contact their local police department.

I. CONCLUSION

The policy outlined above is aimed at providing employees at Vestal Fire District and covered individuals with an understanding of their right to a discrimination and harassment-free workplace. All employees should feel safe at work. Though the focus of this policy is on sexual harassment and gender discrimination, the New York State Human Rights law protects against discrimination in several protected classes, including sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, race, creed, color, national origin, military status, disability, predisposing genetic characteristics, familial status, marital status, criminal history, or domestic violence survivor status. The prevention policies outlined above should be considered applicable to all protected classes.

By Order of the Board of Fire Commissioners
Vestal Fire District

Date approved: February 19, 2025

Reviewed and Approved: January 7, 2026

Revised, Reviewed and Approved: June 24, 2026

VESTAL FIRE DISTRICT

COMPLAINT FORM FOR REPORTING SEXUAL AND OTHER HARASSMENT

New York State Labor Law § 201-g requires all employers to adopt a Sexual Harassment and Other Harassment Prevention Policy that includes a complaint form to report alleged incidents of sexual harassment.

If you believe that you have been subjected to sexual harassment, harassment or gender discrimination, you are encouraged, but not required, to complete this form and submit it to the Fire Chief or any Fire Officer. No employee or member will be retaliated against for filing a complaint.

If you are more comfortable reporting verbally or in another manner, the Fire Chief or any Fire Officer should complete this form, provide you with a copy, and follow its Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy by investigating the claims as outlined at the end of this form.

For additional resources, visit: ny.gov/programs/combating-sexual-harassment-workplace

COMPLAINANT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Work Address: _____

Work Phone: _____

Cell or other phone: _____

Email: _____

Select Preferred Communication Method: ☐ Email

☐ Phone

☐ In Person

SUPERVISORY INFORMATION

Immediate Supervisor's Name: _____

Title: _____

Work Address: _____

Work Phone: _____

Cell or other phone: _____

COMPLAINT INFORMATION – Please add additional sheets as necessary.

1. Your complaint of Sexual or Other Harassment is made about:

Name: _____

Title: _____

Work Address: _____

Work Phone: _____

Cell or other phone: _____

Relationship to you: ☐ Supervisor ☐ Subordinate ☐ Co-Worker ☐ Other _____

2. Please describe what happened and how it is affecting you and your work. Please use additional sheets of paper if necessary and attach any relevant documents or evidence.

3. Date(s) sexual or other harassment occurred: _____

Is the sexual or other harassment continuing?

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. If possible, please list the name and contact information of any witnesses or individuals who may have information related to your complaint: _____

This last question is optional, but may help the investigation.

5. Have you previously complained or provided information (verbal or written) about related incidents? If yes, when and to whom did you complain or provide information?

This is not required, but if you have retained legal counsel and would like us to work with them, please provide their contact information:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Instructions for Employers

If you receive a complaint about alleged sexual harassment, follow your sexual harassment prevention policy.

An investigation involves:

- Speaking with the employee
- Speaking with the alleged harasser
- Interviewing witnesses
- Collecting and reviewing any related documents

While the process may vary from case to case, all allegations should be investigated promptly and resolved as quickly as possible. The investigation should be kept confidential to the extent possible.

Sexual harassment occurs on a spectrum and employers are encouraged to view all potential allegations with an open mind. Disciplinary action should meet the severity of the alleged actions.

Employers should document the findings of the investigation and basis for your decision along with any corrective actions taken. Notify the employee and the individual(s) against whom the report was made of the investigation's outcome and corrective actions taken. This may be done via email.

Adoption of this form does not constitute a conclusive defense to charges of unlawful sexual harassment. Each claim of sexual harassment will be determined in accordance with existing legal standards, with due consideration of the particular facts and circumstances of the claim, including but not limited to the existence of an effective anti-harassment policy and procedure.