



Testimony of Linda A. Seabrook

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Good afternoon, my name is Linda Seabrook and I am General Counsel and Director of Workplace Safety & Equity for the national non-profit organization, Futures Without Violence (FUTURES). For more than 30 years, FUTURES has led the way and set the pace in creating innovative solutions to ending violence against women and children, and improving responses to violence and abuse impacting individuals, families, and communities.

On behalf of myself and FUTURES, I would like to thank the Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, for inviting me to speak at this hearing on *Sexual Harassment at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*.

Scope of Problem

Countless women and other vulnerable workers have shared their stories of workplace sexual harassment and violence and continue to do so. What we have seen from these stories bravely shared, is that sexual harassment and violence is and continues to be a pervasive problem in the world of work.

According to a 2016 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission study, up to 85% of women report that they have experienced workplace sexual harassment.ⁱ A study detailed in an article in *Gender and Society* entitled “*The Economic and Career Effects of Sexual Harassment on Working Women*,” revealed that women who are sexually harassed are six times more likely to change jobs,ⁱⁱ and a National Council for Research on Women study found that women are nine times more likely to quit, and three times more likely to lose their jobs because of experiencing workplace sexual harassment and violence.ⁱⁱⁱ And these statistics are more acute for women of color. This should be of grave concern as it leads to decreased employment opportunities, decreased economic stability for women and their families, and impacts the efficacy and mission of the organizations, businesses, and agencies in which they work.

National Workplace Resource Center

At FUTURES, we are honored to lead the only national resource center dedicated to addressing the impacts of sexual harassment and violence, domestic violence, and stalking on workers and the workplace. Authorized by the Violence Against Women Act, and funded through the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women, the [National Resource Center on](#)

[Workplace Responses](#) (*Workplace Resource Center*) helps employers, employees, federal agencies, and other workplace stakeholders by providing tools, resources, promising practices, training and education to prevent, as well as improve responses to, workplace sexual violence and harassment. Most importantly for our time here today, the National Resource Center serves as the technical assistance provider to executive branch agencies in crafting and implementing policies and programs designed to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and stalking impacting the wide range of workplaces and workers who serve the public good.

Through the Workplace Resource Center, we focus our efforts on the nation's most vulnerable workers, such as those in agriculture, hotel, and the restaurant and janitorial services industries. These workers, who often perform their work in isolated environments, are largely women of color, LGBTQ or otherwise marginalized, are paid low wages, and perform their jobs through subcontracted work arrangements (which weakens the chain of accountability), experience the highest rates of workplace sexual violence.

Sexual violence and harassment, no matter where it occurs, is primarily about power and abuse of power, and not all that much about sexual desire. Thus the process of creating effective responses to and preventing sexual harassment in the workplace must seek to leverage the collective power of all in the workplace to bring about necessary cultural change, and democratize responsibility for creating a work environment that promotes respect, dignity, equity, and thereby, greater safety and support. Workers know how, where, to whom, by whom, and under what circumstances sexual harassment occurs, therefore they must be intimately involved in the policies, procedures, and processes intended to protect them from such conduct.

At FUTURES, we partner with survivors, workers, employers, unions, workers' rights and antiviolence advocates to build workplace-appropriate responses and interventions that promote prevention and culture change. One such collaboration centered around the work of our partners and friends at the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a human rights organization based in Immokalee, Florida that created the [Fair Food Program](#), an innovative and effective partnership among farmers, farmworkers, and retail food companies that ensures those who harvest our food are able to do so without being exposed to sexual harassment and violence in our nation's fields and farms. With FUTURES's expertise in sexual harassment and violence prevention, and using Sunripe Certified Brands as a pilot site employer, we collectively developed a survivor and worker-led workplace-based education, awareness, resource, and response program as a companion to the consumer-powered and worker-driven Fair Food Program, which has been called the "best workplace monitoring program" by the New York Times and has effectively addressed the longstanding scourge of sexual violence in the fields that has long plagued our agricultural industry.

Addressing Sexual Harassment at NOAA

Some of the working environments at NOAA have similar factors that account for vulnerability to experiencing sexual harassment on the job as the agricultural industry. For example, fishery observers are young professionals, often recent college graduates, who work pursuant to a sub-

contract. They board private fishing boats and vessels as the only NOAA-affiliated person on that vessel, which are at sea, many miles from shore. A recent college graduate, new to such a workforce and without the gravitas of experience, working in an isolated, remote working environment, on behalf of an agency that is not their employer, is in a situation that makes them extremely vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence and harassment.

I have been provided with and reviewed NOAA's Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response Policy, which is a thoughtful and thorough policy, and excellent first step. I am happy to address specific questions about the policy when appropriate, but what I would like to impress upon you today is how important it is for the process of implementation to incorporate worker input and participation. Doing so provides the means for creating that shared responsibility and collective engagement for changing culture that we know brings a policy to life and moves a workplace toward prevention and culture change. What numerous studies have revealed, and what I can also speak to anecdotally as someone who has experienced sexual harassment in my work life, is that most targets of sexual harassment do not want to report, complain, or avail themselves of the legal or administrative processes to address their experiences of sexual harassment and violence – they just want this behavior to stop, and not happen again, to themselves or anyone else. So while policies that provide greater protections and ensure greater accountability are much needed and most welcome, we must also engage employees, bystanders, survivors, and supervisors to work together to change the culture that facilitates workplace sexual harassment and violence in the first place.

Available on the Sexual Harassment and Violence subpage of the Workplace Resource Center website, www.workplacesrespond.org/harassment, you will find a number of resources that can guide any agency or organization through the process of collective engagement in changing workplace culture to one that promotes greater dignity, respect, collective responsibility, and safety, to include a model climate survey and code of conduct, a workplace “culture walk,” sample education and awareness materials, as well as myriad other resources and tools to effect necessary culture change.

Conclusion

Most importantly, the voices and experiences of survivors of workplace sexual harassment and violence need to be front-and-center in any solutions and in the implementation of any policies and practices to address this problem. Trauma-informed and survivor-centered approaches in investigations, trainings, practices and protocols provide greater assurance that such policies will be engaged in the first place, and engenders trust throughout the workplace to promote collective responsibility for the kind of workplace every worker deserves.

I thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to be with you today, and am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

ⁱ Feldblum, Chai, and Victoria Lipnic. 2016. “EEOC Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace, Report of Co-Chairs Chai R. Feldblum and Victoria A. Lipnic.” https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_force/harassment/.

ⁱⁱ McLaughlin, Heather, Christopher Uggen, and Amy Blackstone. 2017. “The Economic and Career Effects of Sexual Harassment on Working Women.” *Gender & Society* 31 (3): 333–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243217704631>.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Council for Research on Women. 1994. “The Webb Report.” *The Webb Report*, June.