

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 19-93—SB 1111
Judiciary Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

SUMMARY: PA 19-16 made various changes to laws on sexual harassment, sexual assault, discrimination complaints filed with the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO), and related matters.

This act makes various changes to PA 19-16, such as:

1. placing limits on when CHRO-designated representatives can enter businesses to ensure compliance with specified laws;
2. reducing certain fine increases;
3. allowing, rather than requiring, CHRO presiding officers to order specified relief after finding a discriminatory employment practice, and requiring CHRO to annually report on related matters; and
4. adding provisions on magistrates presiding over CHRO hearings in certain situations.

The act also makes related technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2019, except a provision on the civil statute of limitations task force membership (§ 7) is effective upon passage.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND RELATED LAWS

The table below provides an overview of this act’s changes to PA 19-16. The provision on magistrates (§ 4) is explained in more detail below the table.

Section numbers in the table refer to this act.

Overview of This Act’s Changes

PA 19-16’s Changes to Prior Law	This Act’s Changes to PA 19-16
“Discriminatory Practice” Definition in CHRO Statutes (§ 1)	
Expands definition to include violations of requirements for employers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • post in a prominent location information on the illegality of sexual harassment and available remedies, • provide copies of related information to employees, and • provide related training to employees. 	Retains within the definition violations of the training requirement, but removes from the definition violations of the requirements to post information and provide copies to employees.
CHRO Civil Actions in the Public Interest (§ 2)	
Allows CHRO to bring a civil action, instead of an administrative hearing,	Requires the court to grant attorney’s fees and costs and award this civil

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under certain circumstances and requires the court to grant CHRO its fees and costs and award a civil penalty of up to \$10,000 when it finds that the respondent committed a discriminatory practice.	penalty only when a discriminatory practice has been established by clear and convincing evidence.
Document Inspection (§ 3)	
Specifies that CHRO and each party to a CHRO administrative hearing must have the opportunity to inspect and copy relevant and material records, papers, and documents not in their possession unless another state or federal law prohibits it.	Removes reference to federal law for this purpose.
Magistrates Presiding over CHRO Hearings (§ 4)	
N/A	Adds a provision allowing the chief human rights referee, under certain conditions, to appoint an available magistrate to preside over a CHRO proceeding if there is a backlog of more than 100 cases pending public hearings (see below).
Maximum Fines for Certain Violations (§ 5)	
Increases, from \$250 to \$1,000, the maximum fine for certain individuals or entities who fail to post specified notices as CHRO requires. Sets a \$1,000 maximum fine for employers who fail to provide training on sexual harassment laws and remedies as CHRO requires.	Reduces the maximum fine to \$750 for any such violations.
Designated CHRO Representatives Entering Places of Business (§ 5)	
Allows the CHRO executive director to assign a designated representative to enter an employer's business location, during normal business hours, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure compliance with certain notice posting requirements, including on sexual harassment laws; and • examine the employer's records, policies, postings, and sexual harassment training materials related to these posting and sexual harassment training requirements. The designated representative must not	Limits these provisions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the 12-month period after an employee filed a complaint against the employer or • when the CHRO executive director reasonably believes that the employer has violated these posting or training requirements. Prohibits the designated representative from entering without the homeowner's express permission if the business location is a residential home.

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unduly disrupt the employer's business operations.	
Remedies for Discriminatory Employment Practices (§ 6)	
<p>Requires CHRO presiding officers, after a finding of a discriminatory employment practice, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determine the amount of damages, including the complainant's actual costs due to the discrimination and • allow reasonable attorney's fees and costs. 	<p>Allows, rather than requires, CHRO presiding officers to make these determinations and issue these orders.</p> <p>Requires the CHRO executive director, starting by October 1, 2020, to annually report to the Judiciary Committee on CHRO's awarding of reasonable attorney's fees and costs under these provisions. The report must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the awards of reasonable attorney's fees and how they compare to damages awards; • the complaint category for which damages and attorney's fees are awarded; • CHRO's method used to calculate attorney's fees and costs, if ascertainable; • the number of employees for respondents subject to awards of attorney's fees and costs; and • the percentage of complainants and respondents represented by counsel in matters in which reasonable attorney's fees and costs were awarded.
Civil Statute of Limitations Task Force (§ 7)	
Establishes a nine-member task force to study whether the existing statutes of limitations for personal injury to minors and adults caused by sexual abuse, exploitation, or assault should be amended.	<p>Requires the House speaker's appointee to be an attorney who has represented multiple plaintiffs in civil lawsuits concerning sexual abuse, exploitation, or assault.</p> <p>Reduces total membership from nine to eight by removing the Connecticut Trial Lawyers Association executive director or the director's designee.</p>
Corrective Action in Response to Sexual Harassment Claim (§ 8)	
Prohibits employers, when taking immediate corrective action in response to an employee's sexual harassment	Allows CHRO, even if the employer did not obtain the claimant's written consent, to find that the employer's corrective

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claim, from modifying the claimant's conditions of employment unless the claimant agrees in writing.	action was reasonable and not harmful to the claimant, based on evidence the parties presented.
Sexual Assault of Mentally Incapacitated or Impaired Person (§§ 9 & 10)	
Increases the penalty, from 4 th to 3 rd degree sexual assault, for subjecting someone to sexual contact if the victim is mentally incapacitated to the extent that he or she cannot consent to the contact.	<p>Similarly increases the penalty, from 4th to 3rd degree sexual assault, for subjecting someone to sexual contact if the victim is mentally impaired to the extent that he or she cannot consent.</p> <p>Specifies that the increased penalty applies to contact with someone incapacitated or impaired due to mental disability or disease (consistent with the underlying law).</p>

§ 4 — MAGISTRATES PRESIDING OVER CHRO HEARINGS

Under existing law, the chief human rights referee must appoint human rights referees to preside over CHRO hearings. She must also appoint another referee or a volunteer attorney to conduct settlement negotiations.

The act creates a process for magistrates to also preside over CHRO hearings under certain circumstances. It allows the chief human rights referee to request such an appointment when there are more than 100 CHRO complaints pending public hearings. The CHRO executive director can approve the request if she determines the appointment would be within available appropriations.

If approved, the chief human rights referee must select the magistrate from the chief court administrator's list of available magistrates. Any such magistrate has the same powers and duties as a human rights referee appointed under law and must be compensated at the rate set by existing law (i.e., \$200 per day), from CHRO funds as available.

The act allows magistrates to be appointed as presiding officers for proceedings on the following matters:

1. discriminatory practice complaints (CGS § 46a-84);
2. determining remedies following a default order against a respondent (CGS § 46a-83(I));
3. complaints brought by CHRO against a contractor or subcontractor for noncompliance with nondiscrimination laws or required contract provisions (e.g., affirmative action requirements) (CGS § 46a-56(c));
4. complaints brought by CHRO against a contractor, subcontractor, service provider, or supplier for fraud related to qualifying as a minority business enterprise in relation to certain state, municipal, and quasi-public agency contracts (CGS § 46a-56(d)); or
5. whistleblower complaints for alleged or threatened retaliation against employees of state or quasi-public agencies, large state contractors, or

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appointing authorities (CGS § 4-61dd(e)).