

Nonprofits Need Formal Harassment Policies

PS&H Counsel Liz Manchester spoke as part of the recent OceanPoint Insurance executive workshop series, on the topic of key policies for nonprofits in the era of the #MeToo movement. The workshop features specialists who share business and legal expertise with non-profit executives including CEOs, executive directors, CFOs, Human Resource directors, COOs, and board members. Following her presentation, Liz spoke with *Providence Business News* about the fact that many nonprofit organizations lack formal policies that could protect them in harassment or discrimination litigation.

“This lack of formalized policy is a common problem at many nonprofits,” Liz said. “Part of it can be that they really do need outside expertise to assist with drafting policies, certainly legal expertise in those areas,” she continued. “A lot of times...while there may be board expertise in some areas, they really should have some check and balance in place, to have legal counsel review them.”

Liz pointed out that regardless of the size or mission of the organization, all nonprofits and for-profit corporations should be aware that certain behaviors exist among their employees, and that board members must be aware of their responsibilities.

“A huge part of an obligation of a nonprofit board is to make sure there [are] appropriate governance structures in place and outlets for all the constituents of a nonprofit to have the opportunity to speak to someone, or speak to multiple people if they are experiencing some kind of harassment or discrimination,” she said.

And in particular in small nonprofits, Liz pointed out that the organization might have a whistleblower, with a discrimination or sexual harassment policy that identifies the “executive director” as the contact person for a complaint.

“And the problem with that, obviously, is if the person in leadership is perpetuating or causing the issue, [the employee] is not going to feel comfortable doing that or be able to,” she said. “A lot of organizations are realizing they don’t have any policies in place, or formalized procedures.”

To read the entire *Providence Business News* article, please click [here](#) (subscription required).

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