



Ontario's Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment

by Maria Kotsopoulos
Originally published in *Employment Update* (March 2015)



Maria Kotsopoulos practices with Blaney's Employment and Labour Group in all areas of labour, employment and human rights law. Maria advocates on behalf of employers, not for profit organizations, trade unions, and employees, and has been involved in matters before the Superior Court of Justice, the Federal Court, the Labour Board, the Human Rights Tribunal, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal, and other tribunals.

Maria can be reached directly at 416.593.2987 or mkotsopoulos@blaney.com.

Ontario's government released its Action Plan, "It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment" this month. The Action Plan outlines the government's proposals to raise public awareness and strengthen laws combatting sexual violence and harassment.

The Action Plan outlines the following goals:

1. Raising public awareness;
2. Providing more training for professionals;
3. Developing better outcomes for survivors through the justice system;
4. Creating generational change;
5. Creating safer workplaces; and,
6. Creating safer school campuses.

With respect to Ontario's workplaces, the Action Plan indicates that the government's goals include:

- Introducing legislation to strengthen the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* ("OHSA"). This will include a definition of sexual harassment and will set out requirements for employers to investigate and address workplace harassment, including sexual harassment, complaints in the workplace.
- Creating a new Code of Practice under the OHSA to describe steps employers can take to comply with the legislation and to assist employers to make their workplace safer for all employees.
- Establishing a special enforcement team of inspectors trained to specifically address complaints of workplace harassment, including sexual harassment, and to enforce the OHSA's harassment provisions in the province.
- Developing educational materials to help employers create a safer workplace, free from harassment.

A copy of the Action Plan can be found here: <http://www.ontario.ca/document/action-plan-stop-sexual-violence-and-harassment>

We will keep you updated as this Action Plan evolves into legislation. ■