



New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Believing. Healing. Preventing.

28 Essex Street, Albany, NY 12206

p:(518)482-4222

f:(518)482-4248

www.nyscasa.org

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Press Contact: Chel Miller, Communications Director, cmiller@nyscasa.org

NYSCASA Responds: AG Report Details Sexual Harassment by Governor Cuomo

The [report](#) issued on August 3, 2021, by New York Attorney General Letitia James chronicles repeated sexual harassment and a hostile work environment, perpetuated by Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Executive Chamber. Independent investigators appointed by the Attorney General found that Governor Cuomo sexually harassed multiple individuals from 2013 through 2020. The investigators found that the Governor's actions and those of the Executive Chamber violated multiple state and federal laws, including the Executive Chamber's own written policies.

The New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NYSCASA) condemns all forms of sexual harassment and abusive behavior. NYSCASA thanks Attorney General James and the independent investigators for their thorough and timely investigation. We give special thanks to the survivors who have come forward, speaking truth to power at great personal and professional risk. To each survivor, we say, unconditionally: we believe you and we commend you for your courage.

Sexual Harassment Is a Form of Sexual Violence.

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence. It is never acceptable in any workplace, including the highest levels of New York State government.

Sexual harassment often happens in a workplace that exhibits a [broader culture of abuse](#), which is consistent with the investigators' findings outlined in the report.

Sexual harassment is also an expression of power, rather than humor or desire. [It is rooted in oppression](#), including sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, and many other forms of oppression.

Survivors Deserve Accountability.

NYSCASA echoes calls for accountability for Governor Cuomo's workplace behaviors, and we will continue to advocate for policies that prevent workplace sexual harassment and abuse and promote mechanisms for accountability and healing that are survivor-centered and trauma-informed.

While we await the conclusion of the New York State Assembly's impeachment investigation into Governor Cuomo's workplace behaviors, we invite the Governor to proactively seek support and identify opportunities for meaningful accountability. Accountability can take many forms, but according to writer and educator [Mia Mingus](#), true accountability requires apologizing, understanding the impacts your actions have caused on yourself and others, making amends or reparations to the harmed parties when possible; and changing your behavior so that the harm, violence, or abuse does not happen again.

Leaders in the Work to End Gender-Based Violence Must Act Accountably.

NYSCASA wishes to reiterate the importance of [our responsibilities as leaders in the work to address and prevent sexual violence](#). When we position ourselves as leaders in this work, we must hold ourselves to the same—if not higher—standards to which we hold others. We must make violence prevention an everyday practice, including in our workplaces. This includes creating a culture of consent, in which we respect the dignity, autonomy, and boundaries of our peers—physically and emotionally. When we fail to meet these standards, we undermine our efforts to end violence, and we betray all who look to us for leadership and positive change. If our actions cause harm and perpetuate violence, we need to take full responsibility and act accountably.

Governor Cuomo has publicly presented himself as a champion for women's rights, most recently implementing [new laws](#) to prevent and address workplace sexual harassment and announcing a comprehensive legislative package to address domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence in his [2021 State of the State](#) address. However, survivor testimonies and the new report from the office of the Attorney General reveal that the Governor's workplace behavior does not align with the values he has espoused.

NYSCASA is disappointed in Governor Cuomo's responses to the sexual harassment allegations and the independent investigators' report. The Governor and his legal team have engaged in behavior best described as "DARVO." ["DARVO," a term coined by Dr. Jennifer Freyd, is a tactic frequently used by people who have been confronted after doing harm.](#) The accused **denies** that the behavior occurred, **attacks** the individual(s) accusing or confronting them, and **reverses** the roles of **victim** and **offender**. This occurs, for instance, when the person who has done harm assumes the role of "falsely accused" and attacks the victim's credibility and blames the victim for being the perpetrator of a false accusation. Institutional DARVO occurs when this tactic is employed by an institution (or with institutional complicity), such as when police charge sexual assault survivors with lying or making a false report, or when a government office engages in retaliation against survivors who report harassment and abuse.

In an 85-page response from the Governor's attorney, the Cuomo team questions the credibility of survivors who have come forward with stories of sexual harassment and other abusive behaviors. Further, gaslighting statements such as ["I do it with everyone"](#) and ["\[the victims\] heard things that I just didn't say,"](#) spoken by the Governor in his taped response to the report, (1) minimize the harm experienced by survivors, (2) tells survivors that they cannot trust their recollection of events, and (3) places the burden of harm on the survivor, not on the person who caused harm. The Governor's response reveals that he has much to learn about consent and rape culture, despite his administration's achievements in signing legislation addressing sexual and domestic violence.

Governor Andrew Cuomo must take accountability for his harmful actions and for perpetuating a hostile work environment by stepping down from his position as Governor of New York. If he refuses to take accountability himself, NYSCASA calls on the Legislature to carry out its constitutional responsibility and hold Governor Cuomo accountable for his actions.

Resources Are Available to Survivors.

If you have experienced sexual assault, abuse, or harassment, know that resources are available to you.

- Call the New York State Hotline for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence for 24/7, free, and confidential support at 1-800-942-6906, or contact your county's rape crisis center to speak with an advocate: <https://www.nyscasa.org/get-help/find-your-local-rape-crisis-program> (search by county)
- Find culturally appropriate domestic violence and sexual assault support services:
 - Black survivors can contact Black Women's Blueprint: 1- 646-647-5414
 - Deaf and hard-of-hearing survivors can contact IGNITE: DeafIGNITE@gmail.com or 1-585-286-2713
 - Latina/o, Latinx. and Spanish-speaking survivors can contact Casa de Esperanza: 1-651-772-1611
 - LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors can contact the Anti-Violence Project: 1-212-714-1141
 - Native survivors can contact the StrongHearts Native Helpline by calling 1-844-7NATIVE (1-844-762-8483), or Seven Dancers Coalition: www.sevendancerscoalition.com/resources-in-nys
 - Survivors whose primary language is not English can call Womankind's 24-hour multilingual helpline: 1-888-888-7702

The New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault is a private, non-profit coalition of community-based rape crisis programs located throughout New York State. NYSCASA's mission is to end all forms of sexual violence and exploitation, and to address the impacts of sexual assault. Learn more at www.nyscasa.org.