

February 10, 2025

TO: ALL PBGC

**FROM: Ann Y. Orr
Acting Director**

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SUBJECT: Anti-Harassment Policy Statement

The Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) policy statement establishes guidelines and procedures required by equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws that provide protection for a workplace free of all discriminatory harassment. The Agency's anti-harassment policy covers all the protected bases, including race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, sexual harassment, and non-sexual harassment based on sex), religion, age (40 and over), disability (mental or physical), genetic information (including family medical history), and reprisal. PBGC's policy statement also protects against harassment based on parental and marital status. The Agency will not tolerate workplace harassment or reprisal against anyone who engages in protected activity and is committed to providing an environment where all employees are treated with dignity and respect, and free from unlawful discrimination and/or harassment. It is the Agency's policy not to tolerate the adverse treatment of employees because they report harassment or provide information related to such complaints. Agency employees are prohibited from retaliating against and/or harassing those who report such conduct or behavior. Agency employees found to have engaged in retaliatory conduct or behavior should expect timely and appropriate corrective and/or disciplinary action up to removal from the agency.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines harassment as unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, sexual harassment, and non-sexual harassment based on sex), religion, age (40 and over), disability (mental or physical), genetic information (including family medical history), and reprisal. Harassment becomes unlawful when:

- 1) Enduring offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or
- 2) The conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive; or
- 3) The harassing conduct causes a significant change in the employees' terms, or conditions of employment.

Examples of harassing conduct may include but are not limited to:

- making negative comments about an employee’s personal religious beliefs, or trying to convert them to a certain religious ideology;
- using racist slang, phrases, or nicknames;
- making remarks about an individual’s skin color or other ethnic traits;
- displaying racist drawings, or posters that might be offensive to a particular group;
- making offensive gestures;
- making offensive reference to an individual’s mental or physical disability;
- sharing inappropriate images, videos, e-mails, letters, or notes of an offensive nature;
- offensively talking about negative racial, ethnic, or religious stereotypes; or
- making derogatory age-related comments.

While isolated incidents of harassment generally do not violate federal law, the goal of the Anti-Harassment Policy Statement is to address and eliminate harassing conduct at the earliest possible stage, regardless of whether the conduct violated the law. Additionally, the Anti-Harassment Policy Statement aims to address and prevent antagonistic situations that violate the dignity of the Agency’s employees. It pertains to single or repeated incidents of intimidation, humiliation, degradation, bullying, or other undesirable verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct toward one person or a group of people. All employees are responsible for exhibiting professional conduct and behavior in the workplace and cooperating in the enforcement of this policy. Individuals engaging in conduct or behavior that violates this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to, and including, removal from Federal service.

To prevent and remedy incidents of workplace harassment, PBGC officials must be made aware of the conduct or behavior as soon as possible.

No single situation constitutes harassment, and harassment may be direct or indirect.

Anti-discrimination laws also prohibit harassment against individuals in retaliation for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or lawsuit under these laws; or opposing employment practices that they reasonably believe discriminate against individuals, in violation of these laws.

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to such conduct is made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual’s employment; submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance, or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Such conduct may include:

- an employer or supervisor conditioning promotion, job assignments, or other tangible job benefits based on acquiescence to unwelcome sexual conduct, or penalizing an individual for refusing to participate in such conduct;
- sexist or stereotypical remarks about a person’s clothing, body, appearance, or activities;
- sexually oriented jokes, stories, remarks, or discussions;
- descriptions of sexual acts;

- posting or displaying sexually graphic pictures anywhere in the workplace;
- deliberately touching, pinching, patting, or giving inappropriate looks to another person;
- pressure for dates or sexual activity;
- unwelcome telephone calls, e-mail messages, social network postings or letters of a sexual nature; or
- demands for sexual favors.

In sexual harassment, the harasser may be male or female, and the victim may be of the opposite sex or the same sex as the harasser. Even a consensual relationship between the harasser and the victim may involve sexual harassment. For example, if the victim agrees to sexual behavior out of fear of retaliation, the conduct of the other party may still constitute sexual harassment despite the victim's consent. The focus is on whether the conduct was unwelcome, not consensual.

PBGC will not tolerate the creation of a hostile work environment and will address reported workplace harassment promptly. Individuals who believe they are being harassed or subjected to a hostile work environment are encouraged to tell the alleged harasser (orally or in writing) to stop, keep a record of the events, immediately report the behavior, and cooperate in any inquiry regarding allegations of harassment. Retaliation for reporting workplace harassment or for assisting in any inquiry concerning a report of harassment is prohibited and will not be tolerated. In addition, PBGC is committed to protecting the confidentiality of employees who bring harassment claims, to the extent possible.

PBGC employees who believe they have been harassed or have been subjected to a hostile work environment should report the matter immediately to their immediate supervisor, another management official, PBGC's Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (OEEO) at (202) 229-4363, all-EEO-federal@PBGC.gov or PBGC's Harassment Inquiry Committee (HIC):

HIC Intake Points of Contact

Paul Chalmers (OGC) – (202) 229-3555

Jaime Kunce (OGC) – (202) 229-3463

Arrie Etheridge (HRD) – (202) 229-3728

Wendy Lawrence (HRD) – (202) 229-3142

- Upon receipt of a harassment allegation, the Agency will conduct a prompt, thorough and impartial inquiry, if appropriate. The fact-finding inquiry will commence within 10 calendar days of the HIC receiving notice of a harassment allegation. Absent extenuating circumstances, an inquiry should be completed, a decision reached, and final corrective action taken within 60 calendar days of the HIC receiving notice of the allegation. Extenuating circumstances include, but are not limited to, a delay in receiving the complainant's statement or supporting documentation. Employees who file internal complaints will be notified about the results of the investigation.

Additional information about the HIC Procedures is available on SharePoint at <http://pbgcgov.sharepoint.com/EEO/Pages/AntiHarassment.aspx>

An employee who reports allegations of harassment or hostile work environment, whether to the HIC, a PBGC supervisor/manager, or HRD, has *not* filed an EEO complaint. An employee who wishes to file an EEO complaint must contact PBGC's OEEEO within **45 calendar days** of the alleged harassing conduct or the date they became aware of the harassing conduct. Failure to do so may result in the dismissal of the EEO complaint.

The federal sector EEO discrimination complaint process cannot be initiated by reporting harassment or hostile work environment to a supervisor or management official, HRD or by contacting the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or union.

This policy applies to all PBGC employees. Related questions or requests for information should be directed to the OEEEO Director at (202) 229-6868.