

19 April 2015

Members of the Binghamton City Council:

It is my understanding that there are discussions beginning about the City's Sexual Harassment policy and procedures. It is vitally important that the City not only have a strong policy, but that procedures are actually followed and that complaints are taken seriously. In my experience, this has *not* been the case in the past. And I believe, no – I know, that the lack of real action has cost the City hard-working, dedicated employees. And I believe that a lot of the blame rests with the Human Resources department and the Administration.

When Leigh McCullen filed a complaint against the immediate former director of the Planning, Housing, and Community Development Department, it was done with full knowledge and support of other staff, including myself. I had witnessed a number of incidents which were contributing to a hostile workplace, and I had been subjected to it myself – including an incident which was, in fact, sexual harassment. So when I was asked to participate in the investigation and give a statement to HR, I agreed.


At the scheduled time, I met with HR with my union representative present. I gave a full and accurate statement of my experiences and what I had witnessed. I did not make anything up and I did not exaggerate. Imagine my surprise, then, when I received a copy of my statement and realized that what HR had written in such a way as to minimize and downplay the incidents. Details and specifics were often left out and, in many case, my reasons for not reporting each incident as it happened were completely left out. It was clear that my experiences and what I had witnessed were not going to be taken seriously. Let's be honest, if a male supervisor had done to a female employee what the former female director did to me, that supervisor would have been immediately suspended.

By not taking these claims seriously, and by not actually addressing them, the City has been sending the message to its employees that they don't matter, and that they should "just shut up and accept it." This is *not* acceptable.

While it is was not the only factor in my decision to leave the City of Binghamton, both as a City employee and as a resident, my experiences with HR's handling of these serious complaints was certainly one of the major causes. And I know it played a large part in way the Planning division lost four very skilled and dedicated employees in about four months.

For the sake of remaining and future employees, the City *must* take sets to ensure that employees' claims are taken seriously, and are handled fairly and accurately. Otherwise, the City will only continue to lose staff, which only hurts the community as a whole.

Sincerely,



H. Peter L'Orange