

THE LAW SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE

GUIDANCE NOTE 3.16.1

THE PREVENTION OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

1. This Guidance Note takes effect on 3 November 2025 and is issued to assist law practices and legal practitioners in preventing workplace harassment and bullying.

POSITION OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION ON WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

2. The Law Society is committed to preserving the mental and physical well-being and safety of its members (“**Member**” or “**Members**” as the case may be), as well as all persons who work in or for its Member’s law practice (“**Employee**” or “**Employees**” as the case may be). Members and Employees are to be treated with respect and dignity.
3. The Law Society adopts a **zero-tolerance approach** on any form of workplace harassment and bullying against Members and Employees. The legal profession is an honourable profession in which workplace harassment and bullying has no place. This Guidance Note defines harassment and bullying as follows:
 - (a) Harassment includes conduct that is designed to cause alarm, distress, humiliate or create an environment which affects the dignity of Members and Employees.
 - (b) Bullying includes conduct that is designed to demean, degrade, humiliate, intimidate, offend or affect the dignity of Members and Employees.
4. Workplace harassment and bullying creates a negative work culture which adversely impacts an individual's mental and physical well-being and safety.
5. It is the collective responsibility of Members to advance an environment of mutual respect and wellness for all in the workplace. Insofar as Members fall short of these standards, they must immediately work to intentionally refine their work culture, working styles and/or habits to prevent workplace harassment and bullying.

6. This Guidance Note extends to dealing with incidents involving persons having or having had a working relationship with the law practice, including ex-Employees, clients, external contractors, service providers or consultants (as the case may be), who conduct themselves in a manner that constitutes harassment and bullying of Members or Employees, within and beyond the premises of a Member's law practice.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

7. The Law Society encourages all Members and their law practices to work towards creating a workplace that is free of harassment and bullying in all forms. It is important to appreciate that conduct can amount to workplace harassment and bullying even though that is not what was envisaged. Workplace harassment and bullying may also be perceived and have a subjective element i.e. although one person may be able to ignore or deal comfortably with certain behaviour, it does not mean that it is acceptable if directed at another. The legal profession in Singapore must strive to promote the highest ethical standards and to provide a working environment which prioritises competence, professionalism and ethical consciousness on the part of every individual working in the law practice.
8. Workplace harassment and bullying can occur when one party at the workplace demonstrates behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to another party. Such behaviour can violate a person's dignity or create an unfavourable work environment for him/her, which poses a risk to the person's safety and health.
9. Workplace harassment and bullying can take different forms, including but not limited to:
 - (a) Threatening, abusive, offensive or insulting language or comments (whether communicated orally or in writing) as well as non-verbal gestures of similar effect;
 - (b) Physical assault or actions which threaten physical assault;
 - (c) Unwelcome physical contact;
 - (d) Bullying behaviours e.g. repeated negative actions and practices that are: (i) directed at one or more Members or Employees, causing them humiliation, offence or distress; or (ii) heard, seen or otherwise perceived by such Member(s) or Employee(s) who are thereby likely to be caused harassment, alarm or distress;

- (e) Cyber-bullying;
 - (f) Unwelcome sexual or sexually suggestive words, behaviour or communication, whether of a verbal or physical nature;
 - (g) Belittling or gaslighting (i.e. deliberate psychological manipulation to make a person doubt himself or herself);
 - (h) Stalking;
 - (i) Mobbing or group harassment and bullying e.g. encouraging, inciting or instigating others to harass and/or bully one or more Members or Employees; and
 - (j) Discriminatory harassment (i.e. racial, sexual orientation or religious harassment, ageism).
10. The consumption of alcohol or any other substances is not an excuse or extenuating circumstance for workplace harassment and bullying in any form.
11. In addition, workplace harassment and bullying can occur in the following non-exhaustive circumstances:
- (a) when directed and/or carried out by any Member or Employee against another (*X*), whether or not they currently work in the same law practice, as long as they have or have had a working relationship and *X* is the subject of continued harassment or bullying by such Member or Employee;
 - (b) either within or outside of a law practice's premises, within or outside of official working hours, and at work or at work-related events; and
 - (c) through any mode or form of communication, including through calls, emails, text messages, and social media platforms, in person or otherwise.
12. The Law Society recognises that the context, content and manner in which the conduct occurs is important. This Guidance Note is not intended to proscribe Members from exercising managerial or supervisory responsibilities over other Members or Employees with regard to

work deliverables or performance feedback or review. Action carried out by the Member's or Employee's manager or supervisor exercised in a reasonable, objective and proportionate manner does not amount to workplace harassment and bullying.

13. Each law practice must maintain a work environment that is safe from workplace harassment and bullying. In line with the Law Society's **zero-tolerance approach** on any form of workplace harassment and bullying, all Members shall:-
 - (a) treat one another (including all Employees) fairly, with courtesy, respect and dignity, regardless of seniority and appointment;
 - (b) refrain from engaging in conduct that contributes to creating an intimidating, degrading or offensive work environment; and
 - (c) commit to fostering a safe and positive working environment to each other (including all Employees).
14. Particularly for Members who are in a managerial or supervisory position, the Law Society urges these Members to:-
 - (a) attend, and ensure that their Employees and other Members attend, relevant training on the prevention/management of workplace harassment and bullying, where appropriate and available;
 - (b) communicate regularly with their Employees and other Members to identify suspected acts of workplace harassment and bullying, and to take the appropriate action to address such conduct;
 - (c) institute policies or processes to prevent and address workplace harassment and bullying within the law practice (e.g. the Law Society Workplace Harassment and Bullying Prevention Toolkit – Model Template); and
 - (d) investigate any complaints of workplace harassment and bullying seriously and promptly, regardless of the appointment or seniority of the perpetrator, including taking the appropriate step(s) to protect the alleged victim from any further incidences of workplace harassment and bullying.

15. The Law Society urges all Members and Employees to handle the topic of workplace harassment and bullying sensitively and responsibly, and to facilitate any discussion on the same in a safe environment. To this end, the Law Society strongly encourages all Members and Employees who have been subjected to or have witnessed any suspected incident of workplace harassment and bullying to raise their concerns in a responsible manner; and where available and appropriate, pursuant to their law practice's or the Law Society's existing policies or support schemes.
16. The Law Society does not condone:-
 - (a) any act of reprisal or retaliation against any Member or Employee (whether against the alleged victim or alleged perpetrator) in respect of any alleged workplace harassment and bullying;
 - (b) any and all forms of workplace harassment and bullying; and
 - (c) the making of a malicious complaint of workplace harassment and bullying by a person who knows that it is untrue. A complaint that is made in good faith (e.g. based on a mistake, misunderstanding, or misinterpretation) is, however, not a malicious complaint.
17. Members and Employees (particularly for those in smaller law practices) affected by workplace harassment and bullying may also wish to refer the matter to the Law Society's SCMediate scheme or consult external entities that offer support and advice, e.g. the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP).
18. For the avoidance of doubt, nothing in this Guidance Note shall:-
 - (a) prejudice the right of any Member, Employee or their law practice to seek independent legal advice or seek the appropriate remedy under that Member's or Employee's employment contract or any relevant legislation, including lodging a police report or disciplinary proceedings and/or complaints which may be brought in accordance with the provisions of the Legal Profession Act 1966 and the Protection from Harassment Act 2014; and

- (b) limit or remove any obligations on Members by reason of any applicable legislation, subsidiary legislation, case law or Practice Directions/Guidance Notes issued by the Council of the Law Society.

Date: 16 October 2025

THE COUNCIL OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SINGAPORE