



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Flanagan

Senator Flanagan Supports Women's Equality Package

John J. Flanagan

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Senator John Flanagan (2nd Senate District) this week joined with his colleagues in the State Senate and voted in favor of the measures that complete the nine-part New York State Senate's Women's Equality Agenda. The legislation approved this week would stop sexual harassment at work, allow for the recovery of attorney's fees by victims of gender discrimination, and enable domestic violence victims to obtain orders of protection electronically.

The recently approved pieces of legislation are the final components of the nine-point agenda that the Senate began pursuing last year. One of these components that strengthened orders of protection for domestic violence victims by clarifying that a victim who has been provided with an order of protection cannot be arrested for violating that order was signed into law last year.

The three most recent pieces of the New York State Women's Equality Agenda that have gained Senate approval include:

Sexual Harassment Prohibition: The Senate unanimously approved a bill (S5873) that would ensure that all employees are protected from sexual harassment by applying existing protections to businesses of all sizes. Sexual harassment disproportionately affects women in the workplace. In 2011, women filed 75 percent of all sexual harassment complaints filed at the New York State Division of Human Rights and 83 percent of all sexual harassment complaints filed at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

However, under current law, people working at businesses with fewer than four employees cannot file a harassment complaint with the State because small employers are exempt from the law that prohibits harassment. With more than 60 percent of the state's private employers having fewer than four employees, this bill is intended to ensure that sexual harassment protections are available to all workers in the state regardless of their employer.

Assisting Victims To Fight For Their Rights: The Senate also approved legislation (S5874) that would remove financial barriers that women face when fighting discrimination by allowing successful parties in employment or credit discrimination cases based on sex to recover attorney's fees.

Electronic Filing Of Orders Of Protection: To allow domestic violence victims to protect themselves in the most convenient manner for them, the Senate passed legislation (S5878) that would allow domestic violence victims to electronically file for orders of protection. The bill creates a pilot program to provide domestic violence victims to seek temporary orders of protection through electronic means rather than having to appear in person. The bill also requires the Office of Court Administration to review and update their policies and services for all crime victims in the courts to make sure that their needs are being met so victims are truly protected.

All three of these measures were also passed in June 2013 as part of the Senate's Women's Equality Agenda.

In addition to these three components of the Senate Women's Equality Agenda, the Senate recently acted on the following issues which were also part of the package they passed last year:

- > Preventing the exploitation of children and adults who are victims of human trafficking (S5879B);

- > Ensuring that women receive equal pay for equal work by prohibiting employers from paying employees disparate amounts due to gender (S5872);

- > Requiring employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with pregnancy-related medical conditions (S5880);
- > Preventing employment discrimination based on family status (S5875);
- > Preventing housing discrimination against domestic violence victims (S5876).

With Senate passage of all of the components of the Senate's Women's Equality Agenda now completed, all the bills have been delivered to the Assembly for further action.

"The women of our state deserve to know that their rights are protected with the full force of the law and I call on the Assembly to move quickly on this common-sense package. The New York State Senate's Women's Equality Agenda will empower women to break down barriers that perpetuate violence, discrimination and inequality based on gender," stated Senator Flanagan. "Now is the time for the Assembly to listen to the growing voice of those who support women's equality and who want it now."