

# **Domestic Violence Workplace Policy**

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## **I. State of Purpose**

The City of Saco (hereinafter "the City") is committed to promoting the health and safety of its employees. This commitment includes the prevention and reduction of the incidence and effects of domestic violence.

While the City recognizes that both men and women are victims of domestic violence, the overwhelming majority of victims of domestic violence are women. In fact, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women in the United States.

The City recognizes that domestic violence is a workplace issue. Domestic violence does not stay at home when victims go to work. Victims may be especially vulnerable while they are at work. Domestic violence can compromise the safety of employees and directly interfere with the mission of the City by decreasing morale and productivity, as well as by increasing absenteeism and health costs.

For these reasons, the City has established this workplace domestic violence policy. The specific purposes of the policy are to:

- Create a supportive workplace environment in which employees feel comfortable discussing domestic violence issues and seeking assistance for domestic violence situations;
- Develop responsive policies and procedures to assist employees who are affected by domestic violence;
- Provide immediate assistance to victims;
- Provide assistance and/or disciplinary action to employees who are perpetrators of abuse; and
- Offer training on recognizing and responding to domestic abuse.

This policy recognizes that, in accordance with 26 M.R.S.A. §850, an employer must grant reasonable and necessary leave from work, with or without pay, to an employee who is a victim to prepare for and attend court proceedings; receive medical treatment; attend to the medical treatment of a child, parent or spouse who is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. The necessity of the leave must be based upon the employee or the employee's daughter, son, parent or spouse being a victim of violence, assault, sexual assault, stalking or any act that would support an order for protection from abuse.

The City will not tolerate any act of violence in the workplace, and will take no action to prevent and correct the misuse of the State's resources in connection with any act of domestic violence. Misuse of the City's resources in connection with any act of domestic violence will result in discipline up to and including discharge.

## **II. Definitions**

- A. Domestic Violence: A pattern of coercive behavior that is used by a person against family or household members to gain power or control over the other party in the relationship. This behavior may include any of the following: physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse and threats, stalking, isolation from friends and family, economic control, and destruction of personal property. Domestic violence occurs between people of all racial, economic, and educational, and religious backgrounds. It occurs in heterosexual and same-sex relationships, between married and unmarried partners, between current and former partners, and between other family and household members.
- B. Batterer, Perpetrator, or Abuser: An individual who commits an act of domestic violence.
- C. Survivor or Victim: An individual subjected to an act of domestic violence.
- D. Domestic Violence Respond Team/Responder: Designated employees with specialized training to handle disclosures, referrals, and office safety planning. (*See Appendix for a list of current Responders.*)

## **III. State of Confidentiality**

The City recognizes and respects a victim's need for confidentiality and autonomy. To the extent permitted by law and unless the substance of the employee's disclosure demands otherwise, the City will maintain the confidentiality of the victim's disclosure. Responders will share disclosures with the City Administrator or Personnel Officer. However, unless necessary, the information will not be shared with other employees in the City. Whenever possible, the employee will be given notice of necessary further disclosures. Further disclosures may be

necessary if, in the opinion of the person to whom the initial disclosure is made, an abuser presents a threat to safety of any person, the victim has expressed homicidal or suicidal intentions, or there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation of children or incapacitated or dependent adults.

#### **IV. Education & Outreach**

- A. This policy will be distributed to all current employees. New employee will receive the policy upon commencing employment. All employees are expected to become familiar with this policy and to attend domestic violence training as provided by the City.
- B. Managers, supervisors, and members of the Domestic Violence Respond Team will attend specialized training, as provided by the City, focused on identifying and responding to issues of domestic violence in the workplace.
- C. An Education and Outreach Committee will be established to provide continuing opportunities for education and discussion. Such activities may include "Lunch & Learn" sessions, speakers, and a lending library.

#### **V. Response & Assistance**

- A. Disclosure – Requests for Information, Referral, and Assistance

The City seeks to offer support and referrals for assistance to those employees who disclose concerns or request help. The City will designate trained persons to whom disclosures may be made. Designated persons include members of the Response Team and the City Administrator. All employees wishing to discuss domestic violence issues are encouraged to speak with whomever they are most comfortable.

- B. Response to Victims

- 1. The City recognizes all persons' rights to privacy, autonomy, and safety, and the corresponding need

to control the process following any disclosure. To the extent that disclosures do not implicate issues of workplace safety and performance, and to the extent permitted by law and this policy, the City response will be guided by the expressed wishes of the victim, and may include the following:

- a. Referrals to appropriate agencies and services, including EAP, domestic violence and sexual assault hotlines, local shelters and advocates, legal services, law enforcement, medical and counseling services;
  - b. Assessment of the victim's need to be absent from work;
  - c. Information regarding employment benefits, including processes for changing insurance benefits, requesting paid and unpaid leave, and changing pay arrangement (such as direct deposit or paychecks); and
  - d. Information regarding the availability of unemployment benefits in certain circumstances.
2. Any person who is concern about his or her safety at work should speak to a member of the Response Team or the City Administrator. The City will immediately contact the police department.
3. If domestic violence is occurring in the workplace, is affecting the performance of the victim or the victim's co-workers, or if the victim otherwise requests, the City will assist the victim by:
- a. Referring individuals to appropriate agencies and services, including EAP, domestic violence and sexual assault hotlines, local shelters and advocates, legal services, law enforcement, medical and counseling services;
  - b. Developing an individualized workplace safety plan in conjunction with appropriate agencies and services. The City and the victim may consider, for example, screening telephone calls, changing the affected employee's phone

extension or physical location, arranging for escort to and from parking areas, changing work schedules, and providing information concerning the perpetrator to the City Administrator, law enforcement, and/or the City Personnel Officer.

4. If any person is at immediate risk in the workplace, the City will follow protocols for notifying law enforcement and the City Administrator, and follow applicable emergency or safety procedures.
5. Victims are encouraged to disclose the existence of Temporary and Permanent Orders for Protection from Abuse or Harassment to a member of the Domestic Violence Response Team, especially where the order includes a provision that the perpetrator is not to have contact with the victim at the victim's place of employment. The responder will follow the provisions of this policy with respect to response and assistance to the victim, and address the issue of safety plans with the victim as appropriate.

C. Response to Employees Concerned about Domestic Violence

1. If an employee has a concern that a co-worker is a victim of domestic violence, the employee is encouraged to contact a member of the Response Team to discuss the concern. The responder will work with the concerned employee to decide how best to approach the victim. In addition, the responder may discuss the matter with the City Administrator, the Personnel Officer or his or her immediate supervisor if there is an immediate safety risk to anyone in the workplace, or if the perceived problem has an affect on the workplace, including but not limited to safety, job performance, and morale. The responder will maintain the confidentiality of the disclosing employee to the extent permitted by law and this policy.
2. If an employee experiences or witnesses violence or threats of violence in the workplace, the employee

should report the incident to a supervisor or the Personnel Officer immediately.

3. Employees may wish to seek advice and information from a responder before speaking with a perceived victim, but this approach is not required. If an employee discusses concerns about safety with a victim, the employee should only offer help, not judgment. The employee should also:
  - a. Refer the victim to appropriate agencies and services, including EAP, domestic violence and sexual assault hotlines, local shelters and advocates, legal services, law enforcement, medical and counseling services; and
  - b. Encourage the victim to seek assistance when addressing personal safety issues.

#### D. Documentation

The Personnel Officer will maintain copies of orders for protection from abuse and other documents that demonstrate workplace domestic violence in a confidential file. The City will develop necessary protocols related to maintaining records of domestic violence disclosures.

## **VI. Work Performance**

The City recognizes that victims of domestic violence may have performance or conduct problems, such as chronic absenteeism or inability to concentrate, because of abuse.

When an employee confides that job performance or conduct problem is caused by domestic violence, referrals and assistance should be offered in accordance with this policy.

The Personnel Officer or supervisor, in collaboration with the employee and any other appropriate agencies, which may include the EAP, the Bureau of Human Resources, or the collective bargaining agreement, should allow a reasonable amount of time away from work for the employee to obtain assistance regarding domestic violence. This time may be drawn from sick or vacation leave, unpaid leave, or a leave bank, as

determined appropriate and available. Any such leave will be consistent, at a minimum, with 26 M.R.S.A. § 850.

Nothing in this policy alters the authority of the City to establish performance expectations, counsel employees, impose discipline, reassign duties, place an employee on leave, or take other action as it deems appropriate.

## **VII. Perpetrators**

1. If an employee discloses that he or she is or has been a perpetrator of domestic violence, the responder should refer the employee to EAP and a local state certified Batters' Intervention Project. In every situation where an employee makes this disclosure, the Personnel Officer or other appropriate individual will immediately be included in the discussion related to the disclosure.
2. If an employee is concerned that a co-worker is a perpetrator of domestic violence, the employee should notify a member of the Response Team. The employee is discouraged from confronting the co-worker directly. Instead, the responder will discuss the issue with the employee and work with the Personnel Officer to decide how best to address this situation.
3. Any incident of domestic violence committed by an employee while on city premises, during working hours, or at any city-sponsored event will not be tolerated. Employees found to have violated this policy will be subject to corrective or disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.
4. The use of City resources, work time, or equipment in connection with any act of domestic violence is prohibited. The City will prevent and correct misuses of City resources in connection with any act of domestic violence. An employee violating this section will be subject to corrective and disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.
5. Employees of the City must disclose to their Department Head any order for protection from abuse or harassment, or any condition of bail or probation that includes:

- a. Conditions prohibiting or limiting contact with other employees of the City; or
- b. Conditions that may interfere with the employee's ability to perform job duties.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

The City is committed to providing a supportive workplace environment free of domestic violence. The City will work to respond and provide immediate assistance to a victim who seeks it. Victims will be treated with compassion and will not be judged.

*Employees with questions about this policy or ideas to improve this policy should contact a responder or the Personnel Officer.*

Effective: