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For Immediate Release

Sexual Harassment Allegations Are A Serious Concern For Public and Private Companies Alike

San Diego, CA – In light of recent allegations posed against the Mayor of San Diego, among other public figures, public organizations and private companies alike are being reminded of the seriousness of sexual harassment claims brought forth in the workplace. Sexual harassment claims should be investigated thoroughly and in a timely manner by a member of the organization’s Human Resources staff. Behavior that violates sexual harassment laws can take place across all levels within an organization, and all employees should stay informed about how to properly address sexual harassment claims within the workplace.

“Employers need to be aware that no complaint is insignificant or ‘unofficial,’” advises Jennifer Jacobus, Director of HR Services with San Diego Employers Association. HR professionals, supervisors, managers and executives need to evaluate every employee complaint carefully, whether it is shared formally, informally, or confidentially, to minimize the possibility of legal, financial and reputational consequences. Once an employee submits a sexual harassment complaint, their perception of how seriously the complaint is taken is of crucial importance. If an employee’s complaint or concern is not treated as a serious claim to be looked into, an employee may consider taking further action, such as filing a lawsuit. Sitting on a complaint and delaying action could be to the employer’s detriment in the eyes of a jury.

The first step in addressing a report of harassment is to give immediate attention to the complainant, setting aside biases and allowing a safe and private space for the complainant to provide specific details. The alleged recipient should be informed about the next steps which will be taken and told that an investigation will commence immediately. The alleged recipient should also be informed about who will be conducting the confidential investigation as soon as that information becomes available.

All organizations should be prepared to respond to media inquiries if harassment allegations are made public. Companies should have a designated person to whom all media inquiries are directed. Employees should be instructed not to provide statements independent of their designated media person.

Employers can take steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. Business owners, presidents, and CEOs must be clear about not condoning workplace harassment, and should ideally establish a documented company policy regarding sexual harassment.

Training employees on the topic of sexual harassment prevention can also be an effective deterrent. While the state of California requires mandatory harassment training for all employers with 50 or more employees, training all employees can help people at all levels of an organization recognize sexual harassment and understand how an incident should be reported. Offering a harassment prevention training course is recommended for companies of all sizes.

About the San Diego Employers Association

With a nearly 100-year history, San Diego Employers Association (SDEA) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping businesses manage their workforce, remain compliant with federal and state laws, and proactively avoid lawsuits. SDEA provides businesses and professionals with Human Resource knowledge and training, and is known as an expert in the area of Human Resource consulting for small- to medium-sized businesses throughout San Diego County. For more information, visit www.sdea.com.

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