Human Resources Legislative Update

Ontario Releases Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment

Date: March 9, 2015

On March 6, 2015, the Ontario government published It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment, a targeted action plan ("Plan") to address sexual violence and harassment in Ontario, in part through significant legislative reforms and sector-specific training initiatives.

Among other things, the Plan will target sexual violence and harassment in workplaces through amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* ("Act") that will:

- define sexual harassment;
- set out explicit requirements for employers to investigate and address workplace harassment, including sexual harassment complaints in the workplace, and an obligation for employers to make every reasonable effort to protect workers from harassment, including sexual harassment, in the workplace;
- create a new Code of Practice for employers that outlines the steps employers can take to achieve compliance;
- establish a special enforcement team of inspectors trained to address complaints of workplace harassment, including sexual harassment, and enforce the Act; and
- develop educational materials for employers.

New legislation applicable to colleges and universities will also be introduced as part of the Plan's "Safer Campuses" strategy, and would require these institutions to collaborate with students to adopt campus-wide sexual violence and harassment policies that include training, prevention, complaint procedures and response protocols.

The Plan will also include the development of new training for frontline workers in the health, community services, education and justice sectors, with a view to increasing supports for survivors of sexual assault and harassment, and training for workers in the hospitality sector to empower them to know how to help when they encounter high-risk situations.

The government will provide an update on implementation on the plan's one-year anniversary, March 6, 2016.