

## Case illustrates difficulty of dealing with sexual harassment

Written by Australian Business

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Dealing with sexual harassment or discrimination in the workplace can be a nightmare. Not only can it interfere with a person's long term career prospects, it can also have everyday personal repercussions. One recent case involving Bob Filner, the former mayor of San Diego, illustrates some of the difficulties that victims of workplace discrimination and harassment experience.

Shortly after taking office as mayor of San Diego, several women who worked with Filner made public allegations that he had harassed them sexually. Some of the instances of harassment took place during the time when he was serving as a Congressman, long before he was elected mayor. After weeks of refusing to resign his office and a sustained coverage in the media, Filner finally agreed to step down. Some have suggested that Filner's tendency to harass female coworkers was never caught in Congress because he worked with many different staff members. Because Filner's mayoral office was smaller, his coworkers were more easily able to recognize his problematic behavior.

Too often, women who are the victims of workplace harassment or discrimination are hesitant to speak up for fear not only that no one will believe them, but also that their careers will be negatively affected by their decision to speak publicly. What makes Filner's case somewhat unique is that the women alleging that they had been harassed by him were in positions of power. Unlike many women who find themselves in similar circumstances, they were either at the ends of their careers or established enough in their professions that they faced few, if any, likely repercussions after speaking out.

Unfortunately, the women in Filner's office are far from alone. According to some estimates from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, there were approximately 7,500 cases of sexual harassment in the U.S. during 2012. Although this seems like a large number, experts believe that the true number is much higher, but many women are hesitant to report instances of harassment for fear of reprisals, including losing their jobs or being refused promotions.

Fortunately, those who find themselves to be the victims of workplace sexual harassment or discrimination have legal options available to them. Harassment and discrimination are illegal and the U.S. legal system does its best to protect workers in these situations. For more

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information about the legal rights of workers who have been sexually harassed, consider contacting an experienced employment attorney, who can explain available legal options.