

Sexual Harassment

Attorneys

Thomas J. Cleary

Amber Cohen

Alexander L. Friedman

F. Michael McArdle

Jack C. Zachary

Related Services

Employment & Labor Law

Civil Service Disputes

Discrimination and Retaliation

Severance and

Employment Agreements

Sexual Harassment

Unemployment Appeals

Unemployment

Overpayment Waiver

Requests

Union and Collective Bargaining Agreements and Disputes

Wage and Hour / Overtime Claims

Wrongful Termination

Overview

Where Clarity Meets Action. Ending Workplace Harassment.

Sexual harassment does not always look the way people expect. It is not limited to physical contact or explicit propositions. Under Massachusetts law, harassment includes persistent patterns of conduct that a reasonable person would find intimidating, hostile, or demeaning. That includes verbal comments, suggestive images circulated in the workplace, exclusion from professional opportunities, and quid pro quo demands tied to job security or advancement.

The #MeToo movement brought overdue public attention to workplace harassment, but the legal protections available to employees in Massachusetts predate that cultural shift by decades. If you are dealing with this kind of conduct at work, the pressure to stay silent can feel enormous. Concerns about retaliation, professional reputation, and whether anyone will believe you are real and legitimate. But Massachusetts and federal law provide meaningful protections for employees who come forward, and the legal framework for holding employers accountable is well established. Cohen Cleary represents employees navigating these claims with the discretion, preparation, and strategic focus these cases demand.

How We Help With Workplace Harassment Claims

Every harassment case begins with understanding the full scope of what happened, who was involved, and what the employer knew or should have known. We approach these matters with the sensitivity they require and the legal rigor they demand.

Our representation in sexual harassment matters includes:

- Evaluating whether conduct constitutes quid pro quo harassment, hostile work environment, or both, and identifying every responsible party, from individual supervisors to the employer itself
- Advising on the strategic timing and method of internal reporting, including whether filing with HR serves your interests or exposes you to further risk
- Filing complaints with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), navigating dual-filing procedures and jurisdictional considerations
- Pursuing claims for back pay, front pay, emotional distress damages, and attorneys' fees under M.G.L. c. 151B and Title VII
- Protecting against retaliation, which often creates independent legal exposure for the employer, even when the underlying harassment claim is contested
- Negotiating severance and separation terms when the employment relationship is no longer viable, ensuring that confidentiality provisions and non-disparagement clauses protect your interests

Why Clients Choose Cohen Cleary

At Cohen Cleary, our practice teams combine deep subject-matter experience with disciplined execution and responsive client service. We do not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Every matter is handled with careful preparation, clear communication, and a strategy tailored to the client's goals and the realities of the forum.

Clients choose Cohen Cleary because we deliver:

Practice-Focused Legal Experience

Our attorneys work in defined practice areas, allowing us to develop practical insight into the legal, procedural, and regulatory nuances that matter most in each case. This focus allows us to anticipate issues, avoid unnecessary delays, and position matters for efficient resolution.

Clear Guidance and Proactive Communication

We prioritize clarity at every stage. Clients receive straightforward explanations of their options, timely updates on developments, and practical advice grounded in real-world outcomes.

Strategic Advocacy with Trial Readiness

Whether a matter calls for negotiation, mediation, or litigation, our attorneys prepare every case with discipline and foresight. We pursue efficient resolution when possible and are fully prepared to advocate aggressively when necessary to protect our clients' interests.

Regional Knowledge and Local Presence

With offices throughout Massachusetts and experience across New England courts and agencies, we bring local insight and regional reach to every matter.

Client-Centered Service

We treat every matter with urgency and respect. Our clients rely on us for responsive service, sound judgment, and steady counsel through complex legal challenges.

In our employment law work, this approach helps clients confront harassment and retaliation with clarity, efficiency, and confidence.

Our Strategic Approach to Harassment Claims

We tell our clients that the first 48 hours after deciding to take action on a harassment claim are often the most consequential. Employers begin building their defense the moment they receive a complaint, which means preservation of evidence, documentation of the timeline, and strategic communication all need to happen with precision. Our attorneys work closely with clients to develop a factual record before the employer has an opportunity to reshape the narrative. In cases involving supervisor harassment, this preparation is particularly critical because the employer's vicarious liability defense often hinges on what was reported and when.

Serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island Employees

Many employees assume that sexual harassment requires physical touching or an explicit proposition. Massachusetts law sets a broader standard. Hostile work environment claims under M.G.L. c. 151B can be built on pervasive patterns of verbal conduct, images, jokes, or

exclusionary behavior that a reasonable person would find intimidating or demeaning.

Cohen Cleary represents employees throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island from offices in Taunton and Plymouth. Our attorneys practice regularly before the MCAD and in state and federal courts across southeastern Massachusetts and the broader region, with the capacity to serve clients throughout New England.

Take the Next Step and Contact a Sexual Harassment Attorney

If you have experienced sexual harassment at work, a confidential consultation can help you understand your options and the strength of your position. Contact Cohen Cleary to speak with an attorney who will listen carefully, assess your situation with discretion, and explain the path forward.

Frequently Asked Questions About Sexual Harassment Claims

Does sexual harassment have to be physical to be illegal?

No. Massachusetts law recognizes hostile work environment claims based on non-physical conduct. Repeated sexual comments, suggestive emails or images, unwanted advances, and patterns of exclusion or intimidation can all form the basis of a harassment claim if the conduct is severe or pervasive enough that a reasonable person would find the work environment hostile or abusive.

Do I have to report harassment to HR before I can file a legal claim?

There is no legal requirement to report to HR before pursuing a claim. However, an employer's defense in many harassment cases includes whether the employee used available internal complaint procedures. We advise clients on whether internal reporting serves their strategic interests, given the specific circumstances, including the relationship between the harasser and company leadership.

Can men or employees in same-sex situations bring harassment claims?

Yes. Massachusetts anti-discrimination law, M.G.L. c. 151B protects all employees regardless of gender. Sexual harassment claims can involve any combination of genders, including same-sex harassment and harassment directed at men. The legal standard focuses on whether the conduct was unwelcome and based on sex, not on the gender of the parties involved.

What happens if my employer retaliates after I report harassment?

Retaliation for reporting sexual harassment is independently illegal under both Massachusetts and federal law. Retaliation claims are often stronger than the underlying harassment claim because the employer's response to the complaint creates a clear, documented timeline. If you experience demotion, termination, schedule changes, or other adverse actions after reporting harassment, those actions may give rise to a separate retaliation claim with its own damages.