



West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund
800–409 Granville Street, Vancouver, BC, V6C 1T2
t: 604.684.8772 westcoastleaf.org

July 23, 2019

Via email:

Mayor Kennedy Stewart (Kennedy.Stewart@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Rebecca Bligh (CLRbligh@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Christine Boyle (CLRboyle@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Adriane Carr (CLRcarr@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Melissa De Genova (CLRdegenova@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Lisa Dominato (CLRdominator@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Pete Fry (CLRfry@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Colleen Hardwick (CLRhardwick@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Sarah Kirby-Yung (CLRkirby-yung@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Jean Swanson (CLRswanson@vancouver.ca)
Councilor Michael Wiebe (CLRwiebe@vancouver.ca)

Dear Mayor and Council,

Re: Motion re Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault in Hospitality Industry

We are writing to express our concern over the harassment and assault of workers, predominantly women, in the hospitality industry. For far too long this issue has pervaded the hospitality and service industries. As these industries have grown alongside increasing tourism to the City of Vancouver, we feel that the City must take a proactive role in ensuring that workers are protected and safe from violence. We urge you to support the motion put forward by Councilor Boyle and Councilor Swanson calling for city staff to investigate how the City can promote workplaces in the hospitality industry that are free of gender-based violence.

West Coast LEAF is a BC-based legal advocacy organization. Our mandate is to use the law to create an equal and just society for all women and people who experience gender based discrimination. In collaboration with community, we use litigation, law reform, and public legal education to make change. In particular, we aim to transform society by achieving: freedom from gender based violence, access to healthcare; access to justice; economic security; justice for those who are criminalized; and the right to parent.

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the hospitality and services industries is a pervasive problem, disproportionately impacting female and gender diverse workers. While our concern with sexual harassment and gender-based violence in these industries is long-standing, the problem appears to be growing worse in Vancouver due to the practices of a relative newcomer to the industry, Pacific Reach Properties. We



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understand that a number of women working at the Pacific Reach-owned *Hotel Georgia* have come forward with sexual assault and harassment complaints.

The City of Vancouver must take steps to protect workers in the hospitality and services industries from sexual harassment and sexual assault. Other cities have taken steps to protect workers in these industries. For instance, the City of Victoria recently passed a bylaw requiring a sexual violence prevention plan from all new liquor license applicants. Cities across the United States, including Seattle, have passed bylaws requiring panic buttons for hotel workers. We believe that the City of Vancouver can learn a lot from studying these examples. We are also confident that the City can develop new initiatives of its own to by consulting widely with business owners, with advocacy groups for women workers in hotels and restaurants, and with organizations working to end gender-based violence.

The City of Vancouver can and should play a leadership role in ensuring that employers doing business in the City prioritize the safety and well-being of *all* of their workers. This is no less true in the case of hospitality and service workers who, by virtue of their work are often placed in dangerous situations, and whose experiences of harassment and violence are frequently minimized and characterized as “just a part of the job.”

Employees and patrons of Vancouver's restaurants, bars and hotels are entitled to safety and dignity. We urge you to vote in favour of Councilor Boyle's and Councilor Swanson's motion to direct staff to report to council on recommendations and actions to that workers in the hospitality and service industries can have the safe and respectful working conditions to which they are entitled.

We would be pleased to work with you in supporting your efforts to make the City of Vancouver safe for all its workers, including those in the hospitality and services industries.

Yours truly,

Elba Bendo
Director of Law Reform
West Coast LEAF