

ELEVATE Spotlights Sexual Harassment in the Cannabis Industry

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If you've read the news at least once this past year, it's likely you've seen the growing list of celebrities, politicians, and other high-powered professionals accused of sexual harassment. The [#MeToo](#) movement has empowered many people to break their silence and speak out about their experiences with sexual harassment and assault in the workplace and beyond.

As a result, many business leaders are rethinking their sexual harassment policies and wondering if they're taking the correct course of action to address these issues.

The impact of the #MeToo movement has reached every business, including those in the cannabis industry. Although many companies in this space are still young, they have a unique opportunity to help build the foundation for a cannabis industry that effectively prevents and addresses workplace sexual harassment.

[ELEVATE NE's May event](#) provided a comprehensive breakdown of what professionals in the cannabis industry can do to empower and protect their organization, leadership, and employees from sexual harassment in the workplace.

Read on for important takeaways from each speaker at the event!

Kim Napoli - Attorney and Board Member at [Massachusetts Cannabis Advisory Board](#)

As both a lawyer and a pioneer in the Massachusetts cannabis industry, Kim Napoli had a wealth of information to share. Her legal expertise provided attendees with a complete legal rundown of how they can spot, address, and report sexual harassment in the workplace.

Kim told the crowd that workplace sexual harassment is actually much more prevalent than what the numbers suggest.



“We experience things that we may think don’t even qualify as sexual harassment,” she said. “But they do!”

Kim explained that there are two types of sexual harassment: Quid pro quo (or “this for that”), and contributing to a hostile work environment. Even if the harassment is not addressed at them, third-party bystanders can also be victims. We all are capable of sexual harassment, and we all can be victims, she says. Because of this, it’s important to recognize the characteristics of sexual harassment, and understand

that it can happen outside of the office, such as during company-sponsored events, which are commonplace for the cannabis industry.

If you’re concerned about workplace harassment, Kim recommended keeping a detailed record of each offense, including dates and timestamps. She also urged everyone to become familiar with the [Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination \(MCAD\)](#) and to file any claims with them free of charge.

Eliza Campbell, Community Engagement Specialist at the [Boston Area Rape Crisis Center \(BARCC\)](#)

Eliza Campbell from the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) shared her on-the-ground experience with the #MeToo movement. She says the conversation surrounding sexual harassment and assault has changed dramatically in the last year, and she’s seen a massive uptick in calls to the center.

While the movement has brought much more attention to BARCC and the work that Eliza and her colleagues do there, the spotlight on sexual harassment has been a double-edged sword.

“#MeToo provides an opportunity to address these important issues,” Eliza said. “But it can also dredge up a lot of hurt and trauma for victims.”

Fortunately, BARCC provides many free and confidential services to help victims, regardless of when the abuse occurred. Among their many offerings are legal assistance, emergency services, 24-hour hotline, a medical advocacy team, trainings, bystander intervention, and even support for victims who are currently incarcerated. Additionally, BARCC offers a [vast collection of resources](#) on its website to provide assistance and knowledge to anyone in need.

Maggie Kinsella, Press Secretary for [MassCANN/NORML](#)

Maggie Kinsella, along with her colleague Gregg Padula, offered data-based insight on sexual harassment in the cannabis industry. Their objectives behind this project, they said, was to understand the prevalence of harassment within the industry, and to learn about employees’ concerns.

Gregg and Maggie received many responses from cannabis industry employees sharing their own sexual harassment experiences. A collection of these anonymous comments addressed everything from fear of intimidation, retaliation, and job loss for reporting violations, to reports swept under the rug, to employers who fail to show concern for the well-being of their employees.

Maggie and Gregg also expressed concerns about companies that require new employees to sign non-compete and non-disclosure agreements. These documents, they say, can potentially be used to silence employees who voice concerns. They suggest consulting with a lawyer about any documents before signing.

Most importantly, Gregg and Maggie suggest that those in the cannabis industry learn their rights in regards to reporting sexual harassment, discrimination, and retaliation.

“It’s early enough in the cannabis industry to stop this while shaping the culture and the community,” Gregg said. “Let’s address sexual harassment now before the cannabis industry blows up.”



Pictured from left to right: Heather Parsons, Director of Development at ELEVATE NE; Eliza Campbell, Community Engagement Specialist at BARCC; Maggie Kinsella, Press Secretary for MassCANN/NORML; Cara Crabb-Burnham, Director of Education at ELEVATE NE; Beth Waterfall, Executive Director at ELEVATE NE; TaShonda Vincent-Lee, Director of Community Outreach at ELEVATE NE, and Gregg Padula

Not pictured: Kim Napoli, Attorney and Member of the Massachusetts Cannabis Advisory Board

About the author: *Carolyn Berk has worked in both broadcast journalism and content marketing, and is excited to apply her experience to Boston's growing cannabis industry.*