



e-Newsletter

Information on workplace rights, safety and health, and accessibility in the legislative branch

Prioritizing Safety, Health, and Civility in 2021

The mission of the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights is to advance workplace rights, safety and health, and accessibility in the legislative branch. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the OCWR has focused on the many challenges presented by the current remote work environment and has developed recommendations and programs to assist legislative branch employees and employing offices in addressing these challenges.

- Ergonomics Outreach Program:** Created by the OCWR's Occupational Safety and Health Specialists, this program assists employing offices and individuals to develop, design, or update their own ergonomics programs. A self-evaluation document offers a checklist of information to minimize musculoskeletal disorders. More information can be found at ocwr.gov or contact the OCWR at OSH@ocwr.gov.
- Workplace civility and inclusion training:** This training reviews core concepts of workplace civility, highlights the institutional benefits, and proposes strategies to foster an inclusive work environment. A special component on fostering and maintaining civil dialogue and managing conflict in the remote work environment is included. For more information or to schedule a training session for your office, call the OCWR or email ocwrtraining@ocwr.gov.
- OCWR Notification of Rights poster** is available for download at ocwr.gov.

Office Workspace Ergonomic Self-Evaluation

The Office of Congressional Workplace Rights is committed to minimizing musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) throughout the Legislative Branch. Some employing offices may already have ergonomic programs, and this guidance is not intended to replace those programs, but it may offer supplemental information. Work through this self-evaluation to determine if adjustments or changes can be made to your workspace to mitigate any hazards associated with MSD.

Name _____ Date _____
 Organization _____ Building _____
 Room Number _____ Email _____
 Phone Number _____ Work Station Position _____

Contact OCWR at OSH@ocwr.gov if you have any questions or would like additional information.

YOUR RIGHTS in the Congressional Workplace

The Congressional Accountability Act (CAA) applies certain employment, labor, safety and health, and accessibility rights and protections to covered employees of the legislative branch, including its some unpaid staff. The Office of Congressional Workplace Rights (OCWR) administers a process to resolve claims alleging violations of these laws. Confidential advising is available at no cost.

- Unlawful Discrimination & Retaliation**: Prohibits harassment and discrimination in personnel actions based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability. 5 U.S.C. § 1315 (CAA SEC. 201)
- Family & Medical Leave**: Provides rights and protections for employees needing leave for specified family and medical reasons. 5 U.S.C. § 1313 (CAA SEC. 203)
- Veterans & Servicemembers**: Protects employees who are past or present members of the uniformed services from discrimination or retaliation and provides certain health and employment rights. 5 U.S.C. § 1316 (CAA SEC. 206)
- Genetic Information**: Prohibits the use of genetic information as a basis for taking personnel action. 5 U.S.C. § 1316a (CAA SEC. 206a)
- Mass Layoffs**: Requires that employees be notified of an office closing and employees 5 U.S.C. § 1315a (CAA SEC. 201a)
- Polygraph Testing**: Restricts the use and the results of polygraph testing. 5 U.S.C. § 1314 (CAA SEC. 204)

A claim alleging violations of the above laws must be filed with the OCWR within **180 days** of the violation. If your claim passes a preliminary review by a hearing officer, you may request an administrative hearing or file a complaint in federal district court. If your claim does not pass the preliminary review, you may file the complaint in federal district court. The OCWR offers, at no cost to covered employees, confidential advising services to provide information, guidance, and assistance with drafting claims. Mediators is also available upon request and approval of the parties.

The OCWR also enforces the laws below. Contact us to learn more.

- Accessibility**: Members of the public who are qualified individuals with disabilities may not be denied access to public services, programs, activities, or general public accommodations. 5 U.S.C. § 1303 (CAA SEC. 103)
- Collective Bargaining & Unionization**: Allows certain legislative branch employees to join a union, join, or assist a labor organization or to withdraw from such activity. 5 U.S.C. § 1304 (CAA SEC. 104)
- Hazard-Free Workplaces**: Requires employing offices to comply with occupational safety and health standards and to provide workplaces free of recognized hazards. 5 U.S.C. § 1302 (CAA SEC. 102)

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