

HOUSE No. 1882

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Jessica Ann Giannino and Carol A. Doherty

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act to establish psychological workplace safety.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Jessica Ann Giannino</i>	<i>16th Suffolk</i>	<i>1/19/2023</i>
<i>Carol A. Doherty</i>	<i>3rd Bristol</i>	<i>1/21/2023</i>
<i>Michael D. Brady</i>	<i>Second Plymouth and Norfolk</i>	<i>1/23/2023</i>
<i>Steven Owens</i>	<i>29th Middlesex</i>	<i>1/23/2023</i>
<i>Nick Collins</i>	<i>First Suffolk</i>	<i>1/24/2023</i>
<i>Lindsay N. Sabadosa</i>	<i>1st Hampshire</i>	<i>1/27/2023</i>
<i>Lydia Edwards</i>	<i>Third Suffolk</i>	<i>1/30/2023</i>
<i>Sally P. Kerans</i>	<i>13th Essex</i>	<i>2/1/2023</i>
<i>James C. Arena-DeRosa</i>	<i>8th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/1/2023</i>
<i>David Henry Argosky LeBoeuf</i>	<i>17th Worcester</i>	<i>2/1/2023</i>
<i>Patricia A. Duffy</i>	<i>5th Hampden</i>	<i>2/2/2023</i>
<i>Susannah M. Whipps</i>	<i>2nd Franklin</i>	<i>2/2/2023</i>
<i>Samantha Montaño</i>	<i>15th Suffolk</i>	<i>2/4/2023</i>
<i>Christopher Hendricks</i>	<i>11th Bristol</i>	<i>2/6/2023</i>
<i>Adrian C. Madaro</i>	<i>1st Suffolk</i>	<i>2/6/2023</i>
<i>Patrick M. O'Connor</i>	<i>First Plymouth and Norfolk</i>	<i>2/7/2023</i>
<i>James K. Hawkins</i>	<i>2nd Bristol</i>	<i>2/8/2023</i>
<i>David Allen Robertson</i>	<i>19th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/8/2023</i>

<i>Tricia Farley-Bouvier</i>	<i>2nd Berkshire</i>	<i>2/8/2023</i>
<i>Natalie M. Higgins</i>	<i>4th Worcester</i>	<i>2/9/2023</i>
<i>Natalie M. Higgins</i>	<i>4th Worcester</i>	<i>2/9/2023</i>
<i>Christine P. Barber</i>	<i>34th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/9/2023</i>
<i>Kate Donaghue</i>	<i>19th Worcester</i>	<i>2/14/2023</i>
<i>Edward R. Philips</i>	<i>8th Norfolk</i>	<i>2/14/2023</i>
<i>Daniel M. Donahue</i>	<i>16th Worcester</i>	<i>2/15/2023</i>
<i>James Arciero</i>	<i>2nd Middlesex</i>	<i>2/15/2023</i>
<i>James B. Eldridge</i>	<i>Middlesex and Worcester</i>	<i>2/16/2023</i>
<i>Mathew J. Muratore</i>	<i>1st Plymouth</i>	<i>2/16/2023</i>
<i>Rodney M. Elliott</i>	<i>16th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/16/2023</i>
<i>Daniel Cahill</i>	<i>10th Essex</i>	<i>2/17/2023</i>
<i>Patrick Joseph Kearney</i>	<i>4th Plymouth</i>	<i>2/22/2023</i>
<i>Shirley B. Arriaga</i>	<i>8th Hampden</i>	<i>2/22/2023</i>
<i>Simon Cataldo</i>	<i>14th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/24/2023</i>
<i>Danillo A. Sena</i>	<i>37th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/28/2023</i>
<i>Angelo J. Puppolo, Jr.</i>	<i>12th Hampden</i>	<i>3/2/2023</i>
<i>Michelle M. DuBois</i>	<i>10th Plymouth</i>	<i>3/2/2023</i>
<i>Thomas M. Stanley</i>	<i>9th Middlesex</i>	<i>3/12/2023</i>

HOUSE No. 1882

By Representatives Giannino of Revere and Doherty of Taunton, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 1882) of Jessica Ann Giannino, Carol A. Doherty and others relative to psychological abuse workplace safety. Labor and Workforce Development.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court
(2023-2024)**

An Act to establish psychological workplace safety.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 149 of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the
2 following section:-

3 Section 204. (a) For the purposes of this section the following words shall, unless the
4 context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

5 “Bullying”, interpersonal abuse that operates employee to employee, especially superior
6 to subordinate.

7 “Employee”, any person who renders services to an employer and receives compensation
8 for them including, full and part time paid employees, temporary employees and independent
9 contractors.

10 “Employer”, a person or entity who obtains services from an employee and hires
11 employees for any compensation.

12 “Mobbing”, interpersonal abuse that operates employer to employee.

13 “Physical injury”, impairment of a person’s physical health or bodily integrity as
14 established by competent evidence.

15

16 “Psychological abuse”, mentally provocative harassment or mistreatment that has the
17 effect of hurting, weakening, confusing or frightening a person mentally or emotionally.

18 “Psychological injury”, impairment of a person’s mental health as established by
19 competent evidence.

20 “Reasonable person”, an unbiased person who displays reason, fairness, caution and care.

21 “Representative employee”, administrative employees in leadership or management
22 positions whose responsibility is to oversee and enforce organizational policies including, but not
23 limited to, chief executive officers, chief financial officer, presidents, vice presidents, executive
24 directors, members of a board of directors or employees in human resources.

25 “Third party”, a neutral person with no prior affiliation with the parties.

26 “Toxic work environment”, an intolerable employment condition in which a reasonable
27 person would find it a difficult, uncomfortable or impossible environment to perform their
28 workplace duties and tasks.

29 (b) This section shall apply to all employees regardless of the nature of their job.

30 (c) Every employee shall have the right to a work environment that is safe, affords them
31 the dignity to which all human beings are entitled and free from all forms of psychological
32 abuse.

33 (d) Employers have a general duty to: (i) provide a safe work environment free from all
34 forms of abuse including psychological abuse; and (ii) ensure that all employees are treated
35 respectfully and with dignity.

36 (e)(1) It shall be an unlawful employment practice:

37 (i) for any employer or employee to engage in the psychological abuse of another
38 employee during or outside the course or scope of their work that creates a toxic work
39 environment in which a reasonable person would find intolerable to perform their regular
40 workplace duties and tasks, has the ability to cause subsequent injury or jeopardizes future career
41 prospects without just cause. The determination of psychological abuse shall be conducted from
42 the view of a reasonable person under the totality of the circumstances, its impact on the work
43 environment of the employee and its subsequent impact on the employee's well-being. There is
44 no requirement of extreme, outrageous or repetitive behavior on the part of the offender to be
45 unlawful. The creation of a toxic work environment, subsequent or potential injury and damage
46 to future career prospects shall suffice regardless of protected class status;

47 (ii) to retaliate in any manner against an employee who has opposed any unlawful
48 employment practices under this section including, but not limited to, filing a claim internally or
49 externally on behalf of oneself or another objecting to behavior in violation of this section
50 whether as an complainant, witness or advocate; and

51 (iii) to require any complainant under this section to enter into mediation, forced
52 arbitration, a non-disclosure agreement or any agreement for the employer to see or review the
53 complainant's medical history not pertinent to the complaint, unless willingly disclosed and
54 consented by the complainant.

55 (2) Behaviors that constitute psychological abuse shall include, but are not limited to:

56 (i) Subtle or blatant unethical and unprofessional behavior directed in a targeted or
57 systematic manner such as sabotage; misrepresentation of employee performance or behavior;
58 spreading of lies; discipline that does not follow procedure; withholding of vital information;
59 verbal or written abuse or abusive gestures; frequent request for work below competence level;
60 long-term assigning of tasks beyond the employee's duties without compensation; requesting to
61 take part in illegal activity; public or group humiliation or degradation; consistent taking credit
62 for work; public ridicule; exclusion from work related gatherings or communications;
63 inconsistent following or enforcement of rules; placing in dangerous or physically threatening
64 working conditions; hostile yelling, shouting or physical gestures and postures; outright physical
65 abuse, such as pushing and shoving; looking into or disclosing of private facts about the
66 employee or their family; behaviors without just cause, degrading role changes that could
67 jeopardize future career prospects, exclusion, physical isolation, ignoring, regular inconsistent
68 instructions, unreasonably heavy workloads, unreasonable put downs, excessive monitoring,
69 threat of dismissal, removal of job duties, tampering with or spying on equipment or personal
70 belongings.

71 (ii) Employer non-response or prolonged response to employee complaints of
72 psychologically abusive behavior; rigged internal protocol; unethical communication such as

73 misrepresenting a complaint process; misrepresenting an investigatory process; hollow
74 investigations; misrepresenting findings in subsequent reports; blame shifting; ignoring
75 continued and escalating bullying behavior or the reporting employee's request for assistance.

76 (iii) Employer failure to provide a safe working environment; failure to acknowledge
77 employee complaints of abusive behavior; failure to provide a transparent reporting system;
78 failure to adequately address employee complaints; failure to remove a known stressors; failure
79 to alter or stabilize the work environment; tolerance or increase of abusive behavior by
80 representing employees.

81 (3) Behavior that does not constitute psychological abuse includes, but is not limited to:

82 (i) acts intended to exercise a supervisor's authority to discipline with just cause and
83 conducted in a progressive disciplinary manner in compliance with policies and laws;

84 (ii) demands for protecting the confidentiality of the services provided by the employer;

85 (iii) the formulation or promulgation of regulations or memoranda to direct the
86 operations, maximize efficiency and evaluate employees' performance based on the general
87 objectives of the employer;

88 (iv) the temporary assignment of additional duties when necessary to ensure the
89 continuity of services;

90 (v) administrative actions directed to the completion of an employment agreement, with
91 cause;

92 (vi) employer's affirmative actions to enforce the provisions of a human resources
93 regulation, clauses of employment agreements or obligations, duties and prohibitions established
94 by the General Laws; and

95 (vii) concerted activity under the federal National Labor Relations Act, 29 U.S.C. §151 et
96 seq, as interpreted by the National Labor Relations Board shall not be construed as psychological
97 abuse.

98

99 (f) Every employer shall be responsible for taking all reasonable measures to
100 acknowledge, monitor, prevent, discourage and adequately address incidents of psychological
101 abuse. The employer shall implement and enforce policies, procedures and corrective action
102 plans, including:

103 (i) adopting and implementing preventive and detective internal policies against
104 psychological abuse including, anti-retaliation policies, within 90 days consistent with this
105 section . Policies should include a broad reporting procedure including, formal and informal
106 reporting methods that include, an employee's right to make a complaint outside of the
107 employer's internal reporting procedures;

108 (ii) notifying and training all managers, supervisors and other representative employees
109 as to handling of complaints of psychologically abusive behavior including, the employer's
110 reporting provisions and policies to acknowledge, monitor, prevent, discourage and adequately
111 address all such complaints;

112 (iii) posting employees' rights under this section and employer reporting policies in such
113 a manner that all employees have access including, on the website, bulletin boards, job
114 descriptions and in applicable promotional materials. Any employer who fails to notify and train
115 all managers, supervisors and other representative employees and post notice of employees'
116 rights under this section shall be subject to fines and penalties by not to exceed \$100 for each
117 separate offense;

118 (iv) acknowledging employee complaints of psychologically abusive behavior in writing
119 and initiate a neutral third-party fact-finding professional investigation within 5 business days of
120 a formal or informal complaint of an alleged violation of this section, unless the danger is
121 imminent whereby immediate action is called for. Taking all steps to assure immediate cessation
122 of the alleged violation, which shall be included in the investigatory report including, removing
123 the instigating employee who allegedly violated this section from working with the complainant
124 if necessary. Ensure and monitor complainant's safety through separation from the alleged
125 perpetrator during the investigation and submit weekly written updates of the investigation's
126 progress to the complainant;

127 (v) implementing and upholding an effective anti-retaliation provision that guarantees no
128 retaliation against any employee who opposes any unlawful practice in a complaint under this
129 section;

130 (vi) completing the third-party investigation within a reasonable amount of time, such
131 time depending on factors related to the complexity of the complaint. The investigator shall
132 notify the complainant in writing of any delay within a reasonable amount of time. The
133 complainant shall agree on who is chosen as the third party neutral investigator. The investigator

134 cannot be hired for the purposes of determining the complainant's legal standing or legal
135 advantages and disadvantages;

136 (vii) a neutral third-party investigator shall establish whether or not the creation of a toxic
137 work environment occurred under this section. The investigator shall also establish whether or
138 not subsequent injury occurred beyond the minimum level of damage under this section;

139 (viii) when psychological abuse occurs between employees of different employers, all
140 employers concerned shall be responsible for investigating the allegation of psychological abuse,
141 regardless of whether or not they are the direct employer of the complainant;

142 (ix) if the outcome favors the complainant, issue an apology to the employee, reinstate
143 employee if applicable and coach, counsel or discipline the employee who violated this section;

144 (x) if another complaint occurs after coaching and is found in favor of the complainant,
145 take the next step in the disciplinary process including, removing supervisory duties from the
146 employee who violated this section or terminate the employee who violated this section;

147 (xi) applying evaluation and discipline processes evenly and fairly to all employees;

148 (xii) annually perform an anonymous workplace climate survey. Submit its results to the
149 United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Department of Labor or the
150 department of labor standards annually; and

151 (xiii) quarterly report the number of employee complaints of abusive behavior, employee
152 disciplines, workers' compensation claims, discrimination complaints, investigations and follow
153 up actions; rates of absenteeism, stress leave and attrition; the workforce gender and racial
154 makeup; and de-identified wage and salary data by protected category to the United States

155 Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Department of Labor Standards or the
156 department of labor standards, who will make this information publicly available, at a minimum
157 under the federal Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

158 (g) If the employer proves to have exercised reasonable care to prevent and promptly
159 correct the conduct, such employer shall be held harmless from any claim under the provisions of
160 this section. Such immunity shall not be extended to the person who engaged in psychological
161 abuse in their personal capacity.

162 (h) The aggrieved employee shall have the following options to notify the employer of
163 the complaint without use of the employer's protocol:

164 (i) file a restraining order against the employee who violates this section;

165 (ii) report the alleged violation of this section internally to initiate an internal
166 investigation within 5 days of notification unless the danger is imminent whereby immediate
167 response is called for pursuant to clause (iv) of subsection (f);

168 (iii) seek outside assistance by filing a complaint that discloses the complainant's identity
169 directly and only to the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration or the
170 department of labor standards. These offices shall: (1) evaluate the conditions described in the
171 complaint; (2) if it is determined that the complaint describes a potential violation, the case is
172 assigned to an inspector; (3) contact the employer in writing and require the employer to respond
173 by a due date with proof that the hazard has been corrected; or make an appointment for a site
174 visit prioritized according to the nature of the hazard; or phone or visit the workplace the same
175 day if there is imminent danger. Issue fines and/or penalties, including legal action, to violators;
176 (4) make violations of this section available to the public per the Freedom of Information Act,

177 redacting all private information as to the aggrieved employee and accused, including their
178 names to protect their privacy and not interfere with future job prospects; (5) if applicable,
179 forward the complaint to another agency with jurisdiction; and (6) collect and maintain data on
180 the effectiveness of this section as determined by a decrease in employees self-reporting
181 experiencing psychological abuse at work; and

182 (iv) sue the employer or individuals in violation of this section.

183 (i) Any employer that allows, engages in or promotes psychological abuse that creates a
184 toxic work environment shall be liable to the affected employee or employees. Employers shall:

185 (i) be liable for failing to take the appropriate measures to provide employees with a
186 psychologically safe work environment as outlined in this section;

187 (ii) be liable for engaging in any violation of this section;

188 (iii) be liable for any damages including, economic, compensatory and punitive damages,
189 to any employee who has been subjected to work in a toxic work environment as outlined in this
190 section in the scope of their employment, unless the employer can demonstrate they have met all
191 elements of the affirmative defense. An employee is entitled to recover the greater of all actual
192 damages or \$5,000 for each violation of this section;

193 (iv) be strictly liable for all damages including, economic, compensatory and punitive
194 damages, resulting from any prohibited behaviors of this section carried out by a supervisor or
195 representative employee of such employer; and

196 (v) if not prevailing, be liable for the plaintiff's reasonable attorneys' and witnesses' fees
197 and costs. A prevailing employer shall not be awarded fees and costs.

198 (j) (1) Any employee, representative or otherwise, who knowingly allows, engages in or
199 promotes psychological abuse creating a toxic work environment or subsequent injury shall be
200 civilly liable for an amount equal to double the amount of damages caused by the improper
201 conduct to the affected employee.

202 (2) The employee may hold another employee, representative or otherwise, who allows,
203 engages in or promotes psychological abuse creating a toxic work environment or subsequent
204 injury may file a complaint under Rule 3(g) (1) and (2) of the Massachusetts Rules of Criminal
205 Procedure.

206 (3) It shall not be an affirmative defense for an employee if that employee committed a
207 violation of this section at the direction of the employer or a representative employee under
208 threat of continued employment, termination, or any other such threat. Employers and employees
209 shall be held liable under this section, but an employer or representative employee shall not hold
210 an employee civilly or criminally liable under this section.

211 (k) Any person who reports psychological abuse shall be protected by this section and no
212 person shall aid, abet, incite, compel or coerce any action in violation of this section including
213 such attempts to do so. An employer shall:

214 (i) not terminate, sanction, mislead, coerce, intimidate, threaten, interfere with,
215 discriminate against or otherwise retaliate against any person in the opposition of unlawful
216 employment practices or exercise of any right under this section including, but not limited to, an
217 employee as to the terms, conditions, compensation, location, benefits or privileges of
218 employment because the employee or witness offers or attempts to offer, verbally or in writing,
219 any testimony, statement, information or claim to a labor union, human resources office,

220 employer office, legislative, administrative or judicial forum or any other internal or external
221 office or otherwise engages in any other reasonable participation in a claim under this section;
222 and

223 (ii) show proof of the violation through direct and circumstantial evidence. The employee
224 may bring a prima facie case of violation of the law by proving they reported an incident of
225 workplace psychological abuse and was subsequently terminated, threatened or discriminated
226 against in their employment. Once the foregoing is established, the employer may allege and
227 provide a legitimate and nondiscriminatory ground for the termination. If the employer alleges
228 and provides such grounds, the employee shall show that the ground alleged by the employer
229 was a mere pretext for termination.

230 (l) An employer may establish an affirmative defense to limit damages for psychological
231 abuse under this section where the employer took all steps outlined in this section to
232 acknowledge, monitor, prevent, discourage and adequately address the issues and complaints
233 surrounding allegations of psychological abuse and exercised reasonable care to prevent and
234 promptly correct any violation in this section or acted with just cause.

235 (m) An employer shall not be exempt from liability if the employer or its representative
236 employees or supervisors knew or should have known of said conduct and failed to address the
237 allegations of psychological abuse and promptly correct the situation. This defense shall not be
238 available when the employer or its representative employees or supervisors engage in this
239 conduct.

240 (n) Complainants who prove a violation of this section shall be entitled to all remedies
241 necessary to make such complainants whole. Such remedies shall factor whether a toxic work

242 environment existed or whether or not injury resulted. Remedies shall include, but not be limited
243 to:

244 (i) an apology to the complainant employee and mandatory training, coaching, counseling
245 or discipline for violators of this section who remain with the employer;

246 (ii) reinstatement of work;

247 (iii) removal of the employee who violated this section from supervisory duties or
248 termination of said employee;

249 (iv) economic damages for lost wages, both front pay up to 24 months and back pay;

250 (v) expenses related to treatment related to the psychological abuse including, future
251 medical expenses for psychological injury or resulting physical injury;

252 (vi) compensable damages to compensate for the resulting pain and suffering and
253 emotional and psychological damages;

254 (vii) punitive damages to deter future acts of psychological abuse;

255 (viii) injunctive relief whereby the court may enjoin the defendant from engaging in the
256 unlawful employment practice;

257 (ix) public notification of the case outcome without disclosing the plaintiff's name if
258 desired by the plaintiff;

259 (x) attorney's fees for the prevailing plaintiff; and

260 (xi) any other relief deemed appropriate, including such restorative measures as
261 modification of the disciplinary record of the employee or organizational training.

262 (o) Any person who has a cause of action under the provisions of this section shall have
263 300 days to file said cause of action from the last alleged psychologically abusive behavior from
264 the employee with the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the
265 Department of Labor Standards or the department of labor standards or a private cause of action.
266 If a claimant files a complaint with the United States Occupational Safety and Health
267 Administration or the Department of Labor Standards or the department of labor standards, the
268 statute of limitations for filing a private cause of action is tolled.

269 (p) Any judicial proceeding instituted for violations of the provisions of this section, the
270 aggrieved person may choose to bring their cause of action through the summary proceeding.

271 (q) Nothing under this law shall restrict workers from negotiating broader protections via
272 collective bargaining or other concerted activity.

273 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect 180 days after its passage.

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