

# Management Alert



## Manhattan District Attorney's Office Forms New "Work-Related Sexual Violence Team"

By Karen Y. Bitar

In further demonstration of how law enforcement is being faced with new challenges in light of the recent attention paid to work-related sexual violence, Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., just announced a new effort to engage and encourage alleged victims of work-related sexual violence to report these incidents. His Office will be deploying specially-trained sex crimes prosecutors to swiftly investigate such reports. Staffed by 15 Assistant District Attorneys and a social worker, the Work-Related Sexual Violence Team will be led by seasoned prosecutors with years of experience in the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault.

As District Attorney Vance explained, "Work-related relationships grant predators unique access to people who are vulnerable to sexual abuse and assault due to the power imbalance inherent in so many work hierarchies. When an act of work-related sexual misconduct constitutes a crime, it is not enough that the abuser loses his job or his industry cachet—justice demands, and survivors deserve, that criminal abusers be held accountable in court."

Thanking those who have come forward and the new team he has assembled, Vance noted that these individuals "are serving on the front lines of justice as this historic moment of reckoning arrives."

Hoping to garner support for the initiative, Vance introduced Gloria Steinem, noted activist and author. Steinem praised the initiative noting that "It puts New York City in the leadership of the country, and more important, increases the safety and dignity of women in the workplace. From the executive suite to the night cleaning crew, justice may be only a phone call away."

### The Specifics

Assistant District Attorneys will receive specialized training in "Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview" (FETI) techniques. FETI is a trauma-informed interviewing practice designed to minimize the use of questions that cause victims to relive their assaults.

In addition, Manhattan Sex Crimes Unit prosecutors will regularly conduct trainings to help New Yorkers better identify and report sexual assault. This initiative will now be broadened to focus on workplace-related conduct.

The Work-Related Sexual Violence Team will encourage anyone who believes a sex crime has occurred in Manhattan to call the District Attorney's Sex Crimes "24/7/365" Hotline at 212-335-9373. In addition to victims, others who become aware of work-related sexual misconduct—including company executives and human resources personnel—are encouraged to call the Hotline.

The Work-Related Sexual Violence Team will also work in close collaboration with the New York City Police Department's Special Victims Division. Victims of sexual violence committed anywhere in New York City can also call the NYPD's hotline at 212-267-RAPE.

This initiative, the first of its kind in New York, will likely be the prototype for similar initiatives across the country as victims, and society at large, become more aware of, and more vocal in their opposition to, the issue of sexual violence in the workplace.

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