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Women's City Club of New York Speaks Out Against Sexual Harassment at Joint City Council Hearing and News Conference on Wednesday

(New York, N.Y.)—Women's City Club of New York (WCC) today presented testimony at a Joint Oversight Hearing by the New York City Council Committee on Civil and Human Rights and Committee on Women on a package of legislation addressing sexual harassment policies on Wednesday, February 28.

“Our nation is at a historic turning point where there is new strength from women and new thoughts about an issue that seems to be pervasive,” said Carole J. Wacey, Chief Executive Officer of the Women's City Club of New York, at a City Hall press conference preceding the hearing. “The time for change is now! We must seize this moment and speak out in a unified voice that we have zero tolerance for sexual harassment in the workplace—or, anywhere!”

At the hearing, Ms. Wacey submitted testimony that in part offered a five-part strategy to address the endemic problem, stressing the need for stronger action in the schools and in the workplace, support for victims, and stronger accountability for perpetrators.

“We are hopeful that in this year, what is being called *The Year of the Woman*, the #MeToo movement will yield more transparency and accountability that leads to positive changes in our workplace where everyone can feel safe, respected—while doing their best work.,” she said in her testimony. “And as a result, we believe our younger generations will eventually pass through the classrooms and head into the boardrooms with a better awareness, and an understanding, that all people must be treated fairly, with dignity, with respect, and with an appreciation for each other's talents, skills, and rights.”

You can view a [video here](#) of Carole J. Wacey's remarks at a press conference preceding the hearing, and view images of the press conference on our [Facebook page here](#).

The prepared testimony is below:

Good afternoon. My name is Carole Wacey, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Women's City Club of New York, an organization that shapes public policy through education, issue analysis, advocacy, and civic engagement. Since our founding days more than a century ago, we have been passionately and actively dedicated to improving the quality of life for all New Yorker—in their education, in the workplace, and in their lives.

I thank the Committee on Civil and Human Rights (Chairperson Eugene) and the Committee on Women (Chairperson Rosenthal) for the opportunity to deliver remarks today as you consider legislation to strengthen best practices and policies to prevent and address sexual harassment.

I first want to tell you a bit about myself. Prior to joining the Women's City Club four months ago—I was a Vice President at Channel Thirteen; Executive Director at Mouse; Director at the Markle Foundation; and I worked with Secretary Riley, Ambassador Kunin, Vice President Gore and President Clinton during my two terms with the Clinton-Gore Administration.

My 25 years in public service is why I felt it is important to be here today—I have dedicated my career to working on policy, legislation, and partnerships that support equitable access to a quality education for all young people. Education is intended to provide a strong foundation for success in career and life.

Conservatively, one in four women has experience workplace sexual harassment and 75% of workplace harassment victims experienced retaliation when they spoke up¹. We are profoundly troubled by the climate of fear that exists for women in this country, as evidenced by the now-daily disclosures of prominent men in leadership roles – in government, in entertainment, in media, in technology, and the list goes on – accused of sexual harassment, abuse, and other heinous crimes. Many of the public denials, apologies, and excuses have rung hollow in the face of the rising tide of women who are now speaking up and speaking out. Many have felt powerless, vulnerable, and unwilling initially to disclose the harassment or abuse for fear of losing their jobs, their respect, and their reputations. Sadly, many have conceded their victimization began at an early age and continued over long periods of time.

At the Women's City Club of New York, one of our earliest members was a name I am sure you all know—Eleanor Roosevelt, who once said, “With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts.” Our nation is at a historic turning point where there is new strength, and new thoughts about an issue that seems to be pervasive.

As the leader of one of the longest-serving organizations for women, I want to offer my thoughts about a 5-part strategy to this endemic problem:

1. **Education in Schools:** We need to work to ensure that young people (at an early age) are provided with the education about what is acceptable and inappropriate behavior from an early age². Sexual education in our schools must be comprehensive and include training for all genders on what constitutes improper behavior—boundaries and respect.

¹ EEOC, Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace, June 2016.

² Mentell, Edward J., Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), *What to Do to Stop Sexual Harassment at School*, 1993.

2. **Public Education:** We need to find creative and ongoing opportunities to educate the public (PSA's³, media) about sexual harassment.
3. **Employer Leadership:** Employers should help to education employees (through trainings for employees/managers), develop policies (zero tolerance, share disciplinary actions against perpetrators, and outlines how the filing/reviewing of complaints are to be handled), monitor behavior, and provide mental health support.
4. **Victim Support:** When someone has been victimized, we need to prevent further victimization and offer an array of support—listen, believe, support, and encourage them to get help.
5. **Perpetrator Accountability:** Anyone who violates existing law or public and private policies and procedures must be held accountable for their actions, and any actions that purposely ignore sanctioning perpetrators must be held accountable, as well.

I want to share how the Women's City Club of New York is helping to contribute toward a solution by addressing part 1 of this 5-part strategy I outlined. Four years ago, the Women's City Club of New York joined the Sex Education in New York City Public Schools (SEANYC), which is a coalition of dozens of educators, students, advocacy and community service organizations that support comprehensive sexuality education for all New York City students. This coalition was formed out of concern that students were not being taught comprehensive sex education, despite a New York City mandate that required schools to teach at least one class in middle and high school.

To prevent sexual harassment and violence, children need comprehensive sex education that is age-appropriate and medically accurate, culturally sensitive, and gender inclusive for grades K-12. The curriculum must teach students, from a young age, about developing healthy relationships, and promote healthy sexual behavior that is focused on respect for oneself and others, communication, and consent.

According to a report by New York City Comptroller Stringer last year, only 57% of eighth grade public school students completed the New York State-mandated requirement of one semester of health taught during the middle school years. Nearly half (43%) of eighth graders who graduated in 2016 did not receive a single semester of health during middle school, as mandated by State law.⁴ Throughout all public schools, there were only 153 licensed health educators in New York City, and only 7.6% of all health education instructors attended any training on sex health education in the previous two years.

Sadly, many New York City public school students are not learning about sexual health, and many are clearly not taught about healthy sexual behaviors - and what constitutes sexual assault and harassment. Students are often not even being taught by health instructors who are licensed and trained. Schools need the resources to hire more health educators, train current teachers, and implement accountability measures so that schools can provide the sexual health education that students deserve and that is required by State law.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/thatsharassment/>

⁴ Health Data. Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, NYC Department of Education. Accessed March 16, 2017. <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/city/publicaffairs/Health+Data.htm>

³ Healthy Relationships: A Plan for Improving Health and Sexual Education in New York City Schools, NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer. September 14, 2017

It is promising that, the New York City Council passed a measure, which Mayor de Blasio signed into law in May of last year, which recognizes the immediate need for a thorough assessment of how sexual health education is being implemented in public schools. The law required the creation of a Sexual Health Education Task Force to review the sexual education curricula and implementation and submit recommendations for improvement for grades K-12 to the Mayor and the Speaker, and we look forward to those recommendations for a deeper understanding of healthy sexual behavior and greater respect as our children grow up.

We also need our children and adults to recognize that our city leaders have their backs. The Women's City Club currently is drafting a "Declaration of Rights" that we will soon announce, encouraging all New Yorkers to add their voices and pledge support urging our city's largest companies to take a stand against sexual harassment and support women.

Our vision, and our hope, is that signaling support at the highest levels of corporate America will yield more widespread equity, fairness, responsibility, and accountability. As committed public servants and community leaders, we urge you to join us in embracing a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment in the workplace and holding corporations accountable if they do not make an institutional commitment to create a culture of support and hold offenders accountable.

The Women's City Club of New York supports workplace policies that identify clear sexual harassment and retaliation policies and measures that protect victims and holds offenders accountable. And, we call on corporations and government to annually publicly report information on sexual misconduct incidents and sanctions.

We are hopeful that in this year, what is being called *The Year of the Woman*, the #MeToo movement will yield more transparency and accountability that leads to positive changes in our workplace where everyone can feel safe, respected—while doing their best work.

And as a result, we believe our younger generations will eventually pass through the classrooms and head into the boardrooms with a better awareness, and an understanding, that all people must be treated fairly, with dignity, with respect, and with an appreciation for each other's talents, skills, and rights.

Thank you.

About Women's City Club of New York

Women's City Club of New York (WCC) is a nonprofit, non-partisan, multi-issue activist organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. WCC shapes public policy through education, issues analysis, advocacy, and civic participation. As WCC enters its second century of activism, it continues to pursue economic, racial, and gender justice with the goal of dismantling the social inequities that deprive citizens of the opportunity to thrive. Through member-led Task Forces, WCC conducts research, publishes reports, fosters dialogue with public officials, and launches public education and multi-year advocacy campaigns in the following issue areas: Criminal Justice, The Environment, Good Government, Health, Housing and Homelessness, Income Inequality, and Public Education. For more information about the Women's City Club of New York, visit <http://www.wccny.org>.

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