

Nevada's Sexual Harassment Regulations Remain In Limbo

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The Nevada Gaming Commission (NGC) is in receipt of proposed changes to state gaming regulations that strengthen safeguards to prevent sexual harassment at casinos and other licensed gambling businesses, but regulators have yet to act on the matter.

“Any commissioner can bring the matter up for discussion,” Becky Harris, former chairwoman of the Nevada Gaming Control Board (NGCB), said during her keynote address last week at the 17th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking at Caesars Palace.

Harris said that she was hopeful the five-member commission would take up the eight-page document and “unanimously pass the proposed regulations as recommended.”

NGC chairman Dr. Tony Alamo was unavailable for comment on Tuesday.

Harris, who was not reappointed to the NGCB when her term expired in January by Democratic Governor Steve Sisolak, joined the University of Nevada, Las Vegas' (UNLV) International Center for Gaming Regulation as an academic fellow in February with an emphasis on the study of sports betting.

In November, the NGCB voted 3-0 to approve an amendment to [Regulation 5](#), which would add a new section ordering gaming licensees to maintain written policies and procedures addressing prevention, reporting and investigations into sexual harassment in their businesses.

The change also includes requiring casinos to annually complete a 16-point checklist to verify that the licensee has plans in place to meet the minimum standards met by the control board.

The NGCB's approval came after months of consultation with the gaming industry and interested parties, some of whom argued that gaming companies already comply with guidelines issued by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Nevada Equal Rights Commission.

Harris described the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 as “a landmark piece of legislation,” which among other protections prohibited discrimination based upon race or sex. Despite the protections, she said that cases of sexual harassment “are in the news almost daily.”

Harris, the first female to oversee the state regulatory agency, took over on January 22, 2018.

She told delegates that three days later her life changed at 10:30am PST when the Wall Street Journal published an article describing sexual harassment and abuse allegations against Wynn Resorts chairman and CEO Steve Wynn.

“I spent the next seven and half hours on the phone with the press,” Harris said.

Within hours, the NGCB opened an investigation into the allegations and within days created a page on the board's website to communicate with the public, “because we did not have the resources to deal with all the phone calls coming in,” Harris said.

[Wynn resigned](#) ten days later. Wynn, who co-founded the company in 2002, continues to deny the allegations.

The NGCB brought a ten-count complaint against Wynn Resorts on January 28, Harris' last day as chair. A month later, the NGC [fined Wynn Resorts a record \\$20m](#) and closed the complaint.

Other than the public complaint that was filed on the NGCB's website, Harris said the investigation was 100 percent confidential. She declined to discuss any specifics of that investigation.

“I've said this before ... and I'll say it again now, those regulations were never about one licensee,” Harris told about 650 conference attendees.

“It recognized that the issues surrounding sexual harassment and misconduct are difficult, complex and messy,” Harris said. “I also thought it was healthy for the NGCB to get a dialogue going around the issue with the stakeholders in the community.”

What soon became clear was that there were two commonly held viewpoints, she added.

The first school of thought was that sexual harassment complaints could be dealt with under existing regulations, while the second point of view was that specific regulations for sexual harassment were not only necessary but badly needed.

“Some might say why is this so controversial, sexual harassment regulations, well a gaming license in Nevada is a privileged license and there are no property rights to it,” Harris said. “If the NGCB had regulations describing certain behaviors ... you could lose your license and that’s a real expensive proposition.”

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