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OPINION

Sexual misconduct: Transform the Capitol's patriarchy

BY *GLADYS LIMÓN* POSTED 12.04.2017

As a statewide women-led alliance that advocates at the Capitol to create equity-focused policies for healthy, sustainable communities, we rise with the nearly 200 women who have [signed a letter](#) denouncing a culture of rampant sexual abuse and violence in and around the Capitol.

We condemn both those whom have engaged in such intolerable conduct, as well as the individuals whom over years have enabled such violence by failing to meet their moral and legal obligations to end it.

We commend all who have come forward to challenge this perverse system.

The pervasiveness of sexual harassment and assault has thankfully become a subject of public debate across the nation, including at the California Legislature. Last week, the *Assembly Rules Subcommittee on Harassment, Discrimination, and Retaliation Prevention and Response* conducted a [hearing](#) to discuss how to reform an institutional culture that has failed at deterring sexual harassment and assault.

In dozens of interviews, women legislators, lobbyists, and legislative aides have courageously shared their experiences and articulated the devastating long-term impacts of enduring years of a culture of sexual harassment and assault. We commend all who have come forward to challenge this perverse system.

In order to create effective policy and procedural changes, it is imperative that we name the problem for what it is: an entrenched system of violent patriarchy that uses sexual assault and harassment as a form of control and dominance over women, transgender, and gender non-conforming people.

Sexual assault and harassment part of a deeply embedded power system of patriarchy that must be transformed.

Our society has yet to confront and recognize the severity and entrenched function of this sexual violence. Too often, sexual harassment and assault is widely seen as individualized “misconduct,” and then largely dismissed. Sexual assault and harassment are not simply about individual bad behavior to be punished, but is part of a deeply embedded power system of patriarchy that must be transformed.

Sexual harassment and assault strip people of their inherent dignity and strength in order for the perpetrator to feel dominant and hold power over the victim. That this conduct occurs in the highest places of government from men in suits, who purport to stand for civility and the law, reflects a deeply corrupt power structure.

This very power structure maintains and perpetuates gender inequality throughout the many layers of our society, and is an urgent human rights issue. It is not just women who struggle with the impacts of patriarchy, it is also LGBTQI, transgender and other gender non-conforming people whose unique experiences must urgently be included and addressed.

We thank the California Legislative Women’s Caucus for its commitment to lead efforts to shift the culture to one where women feel safe in coming forward and receive protection they are legally entitled to, and where men, regardless of their position of power, know that such conduct comes with the strictest of consequences.

We also recognize the many men who stand on their own dignity and integrity, and therefore do not engage in such conduct, who join those leadership efforts.

It is the responsibility of California’s elected leadership to put an end to both the sexual violence and culture that permits and promotes the devaluation of women and gender non-conforming people. We stand united with all those calling for full, independent investigations with publicly reported findings together with a serious and comprehensive effort to implement effective harassment policies, procedures and training processes within the legislative and executive branches.

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Ed’s Note: Gladys Limón, is the new executive director of the California Environmental Justice Alliance, a statewide coalition of grassroots, environmental justice groups.