

# What to Do if You Get Vito Lopez'd at Work

BY SYDNEY BROWNSTONE

THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2013 AT 10 A.M.



[Victor1558](#) via [Compfight cc](#)

On Wednesday, state ethics regulators unleashed a [68-page document](#) detailing young, female staffers' allegations of sexual harassment from Assemblyman Vito Lopez. One complainant described Lopez's attempts to force his hands up her inner thighs on car trips. He asked another to wear heels and short skirts. Another began to cry when Lopez pressured her to massage his hand, during which she told him his behavior made her uncomfortable because she was raped in college, according to the report.

The details are shocking, but not uncommon. An ABC News/*Washington Post* poll in 2011 found that [one in four](#) American women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Still, few women [report](#) the sexual harassment they experience for fear of retribution--though we're guaranteed the right to a safe work environment, and the Supreme Court has recognized that the psychological damage caused by sexual harassment can violate the law, according to Suzanne B. Goldberg, a director and professor at Columbia University's Center for Gender and Sexuality Law.

Translation: No one should ever have to fucking stand for that shit, because getting sexually harassed is absurd and not OK. But what do you do in those circumstances? We spoke to two experts to find out what you can do if you find yourself struggling in a threatening workplace environment.

**Talk to your harasser.** "First and foremost, I think that [those being sexually harassed] should

immediately communicate to the harasser that their conduct is making them uncomfortable and is unacceptable," says Michael J. Pospis, a sexual harassment attorney and owner of his own practice in New York City. "Make sure they know whether there's a sexual harassment policy at the company," he added.

**Report it.** The other first step, says Columbia's Goldberg, is to find if there's an internal reporting mechanism in the workplace and find out if you'd be comfortable using it. "Usually for purposes of a lawsuit, a case is usually stronger if the target of the harassment has reported the harassment, or at least if the harassment has been visible to others," she says. If your harasser happens to be part of that reporting mechanism, Pospis also suggests going as far up the food chain as possible to report the behavior.

**What constitutes sexual harassment?** Forcible touching or unconsented touching clearly crosses the line, according to Goldberg. Unwelcome or sexualized remarks--about appearance, clothing, bodies--qualify too, but not as isolated incidents. "A single remark, unless it's a severe threat, is unlikely to be enough for a successful civil suit against a harasser," Goldberg says.

"More often than not it's lewd comments about someone's body, touching body parts, e-mails, jokes, and viewing pornography in the workplace," Pospis adds.

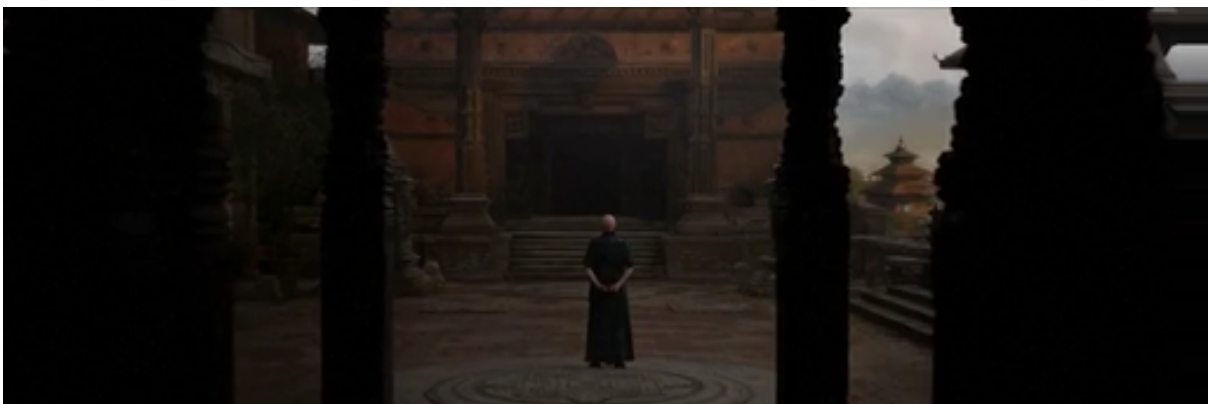
**Take notes.** At least two of Lopez's employees began to make audio recordings to capture his behavior and comments on tape. "I also always encourage employees to keep a careful record of what has happened, including what was said, when it was said, the time," Goldberg says.

**Talk to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the New York City Human Rights Commission.** If internal reporting doesn't work, "I encourage the target of the harassment either to find a lawyer or to consult with the [Human Rights Commission](#), which does not cost a complainant anything," Goldberg says. You can also file a charge with the [EEOC](#), if you work for a place that has 15 employees or more, Pospis adds.

*Send story ideas to [sbrownstone@villagevoice.com](mailto:sbrownstone@villagevoice.com). Follow her on Twitter [here](#).*

---

Sponsor Content





©2016 Village Voice, LLC. All rights reserved.