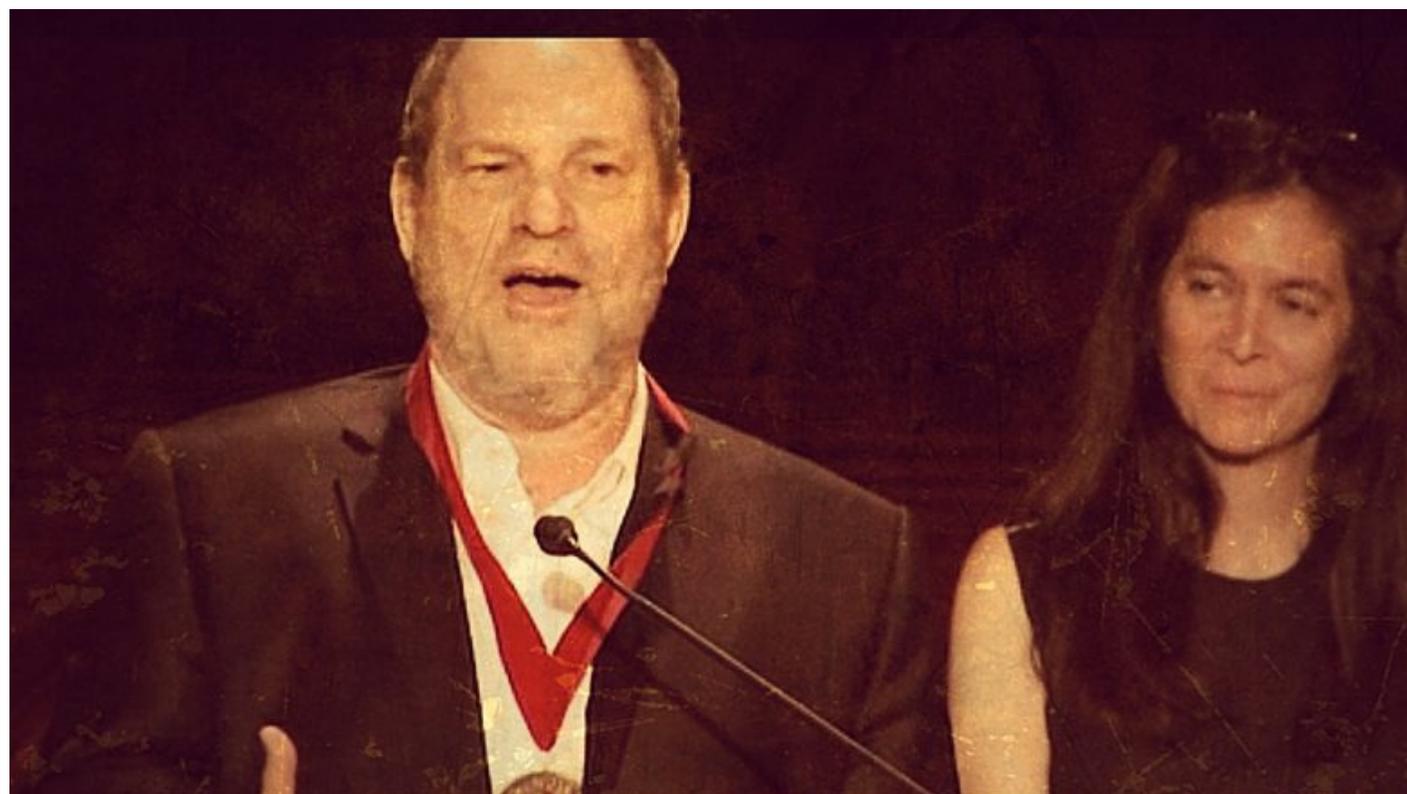


Hold-It Nation: Why Massachusetts Women Are As Vulnerable As One of Harvey Weinstein's Starlets

By [Chanel Prunier](#) | October 23, 2017, 11:29 EDT

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A little over a year ago, the Bathroom and Locker Room Law took effect, and women and children in Massachusetts were forced to forfeit their rights to privacy in order to protect the feelings of a tiny portion of our population. The 2016 “Gender Identity Non-Discrimination Act” was sold to the public and legislators as necessary legislation to protect transgendered individuals from being kicked out of restaurants, hotels, and hospitals.

What the citizens of Massachusetts weren’t told was that there were only a handful of allegations of such denial of access to public accommodations and that those claims were already covered under state law. What changed a year ago was access to bathrooms, locker rooms, showers, and changing facilities. It is now a potential criminal civil rights violation for a woman or young girl to object when a biological male undresses next to her in a public facility. This is not progress for our Commonwealth. We should not require women to sacrifice their privacy and safety to make others feel more comfortable.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what we’ve seen happen in the last year, and countless other episodes are likely quietly happening all across our state and nation with “Transgender rights laws.” In December, a woman was photographed by a man lurking in the ladies’ room of a T.J. Maxx in Plainville, Massachusetts. When she asked employees for help, they seemed torn regarding what to do. Do they call the police, and risk being brought up on hate crimes charges? Or do they protect themselves and their employer by looking the other way, effectively siding with the man over the frightened woman? The law is now heavily weighted to benefit, protect, and even encourage those men who would violate private spaces, and designed to silence anyone who objects to what was once regarded as obscene behavior. How many cases go unreported, when it’s a biological man’s word against a scared woman in a locker room?

Does this story of frightened and abused women not coming forward sound familiar? Right now in the media, the Harvey Weinstein saga is unfolding, and we’re seeing how dozens, perhaps hundreds, of women over decades were cowed into silence. At a minimum, they were harassed by a pig and scared for their careers, at worst some of them were physically abused and assaulted. Everyone in Hollywood knew what was going on, but no one would speak up — from employees of his company, to fellow actresses, to journalists — and everyone went along with it, because Weinstein was a powerful man and had the media and the industry in the palm of his hand. He had the power to destroy them, so they kept their mouths shut.

Why? The power dynamic was dramatically tilted to favor him, and were it his word against theirs, the young women knew *they’d* be punished. The Bathroom and Locker Room Law similarly shifts all power away from scared women in restrooms or locker rooms to their abusers. Men are free to expose themselves to them, and if the women complain, THEY’re the one charged with a crime. The law has no provisions preventing sex offenders from going into ladies’ locker rooms, undressing, and ogling women. Perverted men can simply claim to be transgender — and no one would dare challenge them, for fear of being wrong because the penalties are so high. Women like the one in T.J. Maxx who call for police are told to think twice, lest they be charged with a hate crime. This is the power dynamic written right into our Massachusetts state laws.

Before the new law even took effect, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey made it clear she would prosecute those who disagree with this ideology at any opportunity, whether they’re running churches, women’s

shelters, schools, or fitness centers. [Here's what Healey said](#) on this topic in April 2016: "I have been particularly troubled over the last year with what we've seen with some of the rhetoric and people's attempts to really distract the public by discussing this as a bathroom bill. And to them I say if you've got that much of a problem, hold it."

How many will not fight back with that hanging over them? The Bathroom and Locker Room Law provides the weight of the law and government behind the Harvey Weinsteins of the world, and tells the world "don't dare object."

Critics of our repeal will say "there have been very few incidents of men posing as transgender to ogle women." But like the victims of Harvey Weinstein, women quickly find out where they stand when they learn of the Bathroom and Locker Room Law. It's because of the law and the power dynamic it creates that they don't bother to step forward, knowing the only ones they'll harm are themselves. The law makes it in their own best interest to just put up with it if a man flashes them, or watches them intently in a formerly private setting. Imagine being assaulted and then receiving a \$2,500 fine for committing a hate crime because you complained and it's your word against a protected class — transgender people. These women are an un-kept secret—not coming forward, hiding in plain sight.

Only the repeal of the law will tip the balance back, to restore the rights of women in private situations. It's also a question of the rights of businesses and homeless shelters to be free to actually address violations, rather than telling frightened women they just need to go along with abuse, lest everyone get in trouble with Hold-It Healey.

After one year, women's rights are undermined more than ever, they fear for their safety, and organizations like homeless shelters must worry more about lawsuits rather than ministering to the needy or caring about frightened women. It's time to repeal this law.

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