

Assembly Dems call on Gruszynski to resign after sexual harassment probe

Posted on Thursday, Dec 19, 2019

Dem state Rep. Staush Gruszynski faced pressure today to resign from both his Assembly colleagues and his party after an investigation found he verbally sexually harassed a legislative employee.

A probe conducted by the Legislative Human Resources Office substantiated a complaint that the Green Bay Dem sexually harassed a legislative employee at an offsite location after work hours, according to the office of Minority Leader Gordon Hintz, D-Oshkosh.

“It’s our job to create a culture of accountability and to ensure members and legislative employees are held to a high standard of conduct,” Hintz said in a statement. “In recognition of the seriousness of this substantiated investigation, we have immediately stripped Rep. Gruszynski of his committee assignments. Rep. Gruszynski will no longer be caucusing with the Assembly Democrats, and should resign.”

Gruszynski acknowledged he “made a terrible mistake after drinking too much in a Madison bar” two months ago. Still, his statement didn’t address calls for him to resign, and he said his focus is on his family and how in the new year he continues “to move forward serving the constituents of the 90th district.”

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“My conduct was unprofessional and completely unacceptable,” said Gruszynski, who was elected in 2018. “I need to be responsible for my actions and following that night I’ve taken steps with my family, and more importantly myself, to rebuild

what I've broken.”

Hintz's office said the complaint resulted in a formal investigation by human resources, and the Dem lawmaker didn't have documentation of the allegations. The human resource office didn't immediately return a call late this afternoon seeking details of the complaint.

Gruzynski is the latest member of the Assembly to be accused of sexual harassment. Two years ago, then-Dem Rep. Josh Zepnick was accused of kissing two women against their will at political events in 2011 and 2015. He rejected pressure from Hintz to resign his seat, but lost in a 2018 Dem primary to Marisabel Cabrera.

In 2014, Republicans stripped then-Rep. Bill Kramer of his post as majority leader after he was accused of groping one woman and verbally abusing another during a fundraising trip to Washington, D.C. The Waukesha Republican separately faced charges of groping a GOP staffer at a Republican event in 2011 and pleaded no contest to fourth-degree sexual assault.

State Dem Party Chair Ben Wikler backed the move in a statement released shortly after Hintz called for Gruszynski's resignation.

“We have zero tolerance for sexual harassment at the Democratic Party of Wisconsin and expect elected leaders to hold themselves to the same standard,” Wikler said. “In acknowledgment of the gravity of Rep. Gruszynski's actions, we echo Leader Hintz's request that he step down.”

A spokeswoman for Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, said Gruszynski will be removed from his committee assignments per the request of the minority caucus leaders.

See the Hintz release:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/191219HINTZ.pdf>

See the DPW release:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/191219-DPW-Gruszynski.pdf>