# Domestic Violence at Work: A Policy Refresh for HR Leaders



Domestic violence (or, intimate partner violence) doesn't always stay at home. It can show up at work through stalking, threatening calls or emails, unwanted visits, technology-enabled harassment, or safety risks to coworkers and clients. As HR managers get settled into 2026, it's worth treating domestic violence and workplace safety as one integrated policy area: support the affected worker, reduce risk for everyone, and stay aligned with evolving legal expectations
across all jurisdictions.

## 2025/2026 Changes in North American Legislature

Even if your core policy is solid, the legal landscape keeps moving, especially around job-protected leave, harassment/violence prevention plans, and training.

### Canada

- Nova Scotia expanded paid domestic violence leave, increasing paid leave to five days (from three) as of April 1, 2025, alongside existing job-protected domestic violence leave options.
- British Columbia expanded job-protected unpaid medical leave to up to 27 weeks (effective Nov. 28, 2025), which can be relevant when workers need time off due to trauma-related illness, injury, or recovery.
- Saskatchewan introduced/advanced amendments projected to take effect Jan. 1, 2026, including a new unpaid leave (up to 16 weeks) for interpersonal or sexual violence, intended to supplement existing shorter leave entitlements.
- Ontario's "Working for Workers Five Act" (Bill 190) updated OHS/ESA-related obligations and has been widely interpreted as pushing employers to modernize harassment and violence policies for virtual/digital work contexts.
- For federally regulated workplaces, the Canada Labour Code continues to provide family violence leave (up to 10 days) for defined purposes (medical care, victim services, relocation, legal/law enforcement steps, etc.).

### United States

- California AB 406 (signed Oct. 1, 2025) expanded and clarified leave protections for employees affected by certain crimes (including domestic violence-related

scenarios) under multiple California code sections.
- Illinois amended VESSA (effective Jan. 1, 2026) to protect employees who document violence (including domestic violence) using employer-provided devices, reinforcing non-retaliation expectations.
- New York's Retail Worker Safety Act requires many retail employers to implement a workplace violence prevention policy and training; 2025 amendments clarified requirements, with additional measures (like silent response buttons for very large employers) slated for Jan. 1, 2027.
- At the federal level, proposals such as a Workplace Violence Prevention bill (H.R. 2531, 119th Congress 2025–2026) signal continued attention, especially in healthcare and social services, even when nationwide rules aren't yet uniform.

## Checklist: What to Include in an Updated Domestic Violence and Workplace Safety Policy

□□□□ Use this as a "policy rebuild" list for HR and Health & Safety committees.

□□□□ Clear purpose + scope (in-person, remote, field work, off-site events, digital channels).

□□□□ Definitions (domestic violence/IPV, workplace violence, harassment, tech-facilitated abuse).

□□□□ Confidential disclosure pathway (who to contact, after-hours options, trauma-informed intake).

□□□□ Non-retaliation and privacy commitments (need-to-know disclosure only).

□□□□ Safety planning process (individualized plans; roles for HR, security, managers).

□□□□ Risk assessment triggers (protective orders, threats, stalking, separation escalation, weapons concerns).

□□□□ Workplace controls (photo/description of offender where lawful, visitor protocols, reception scripts, parking escorts, panic buttons where applicable).

□□□□ Technology safeguards (device/account access, location sharing risks, doxxing response).

□□□□ Leave and accommodation options (paid/unpaid leave, schedule changes, remote work, temporary reassignment, workload adjustments).

□□□□ Coordination with law enforcement / restraining orders (how HR supports without escalating risk).

□□□□ Training requirements (managers, supervisors, reception/frontline; scenario-based practice).

□□□□ Incident reporting + documentation standards (what to record, where stored, retention).

□□□□ Support resources (EAP, local shelters, victim services, security support).

□□□□ Review cadence (annual minimum; after any serious incident).

□□□□ Protecting workers when domestic violence "bleeds" into the workplace.

## Summary

### Treat disclosure like a safety report, not a performance issue.

Train managers to respond with: belief, privacy, and immediate options, then loop in the right internal supports.

### Build a safety plan that reduces visibility and predictability.

Change routines that an abuser can exploit: parking location, shift start times, work location, meeting formats, and public directory listings.

### Offer practical accommodations fast, then adjust.

Start with temporary measures (two to four weeks) and reassess. In Canada, remember workers may also access statutory leaves (varying by jurisdiction) or federal family violence leave in federally regulated settings.

### Protect coworkers without naming the survivor.

You can tighten access control, update front-desk protocols, and increase security presence without broadcasting personal details.

### Make digital safety part of workplace safety.

Harassment often comes through email, socials, or messaging. Update your violence/harassment program for online threats and virtual interactions—especially where local law has pushed modernized definitions and expectations.