

SILICON VALLEY DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA:
HARASSMENT GRIEVANCE POLICY

Democratic Socialists of America is committed to creating a space that is welcoming and inclusive to members of all genders, races, and classes. The following policy provides guidelines to ensure that everyone is able to organize without fear of harassment, abuse, or harm.

1. Scope

- a. **Prohibited behavior.** Members shall not engage in harassment on the basis of sex, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, physical appearance, disability, race, color, religion, national origin, class, age, or profession. Harassing or abusive behavior, such as unwelcome¹ attention, inappropriate or offensive remarks, slurs, or jokes, physical or verbal intimidation, stalking, inappropriate physical contact or proximity, and other verbal and physical conduct constitute harassment when:
 - i. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a member's continued affiliation with DSA;
 - ii. Submission or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for organizational decisions affecting such individual; or
 - iii. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of creating a hostile environment interfering with an individual's capacity to organize within DSA.²
- b. **Other protected classes.** Harassment based on categories not encompassed by those listed section (a) will be evaluated at the discretion of the HGO and Chapter Committee representatives.
- c. **Complaints.** Members may follow the standard DSA complaint process as set out in the following sections if they believe they have been harassed by another member. There will be no time limits requiring the accuser to file a report within any amount of time after the alleged harassment has occurred.

2. Harassment Grievance Officers. Members filing a formal complaint must contact a DSA harassment grievance officer ("HGO").

- a. **HGO responsibilities.** The HGO(s) will:

¹ "Unwelcome" means in the sense that the member did not solicit or incite it, and in the sense that the member regarded the conduct as undesirable or offensive. See *Henson v. City of Dundee*, 682 F.2d 897, 903 (11th Cir. 1982).

² A "hostile environment" is one in which the harassment is sufficiently severe or pervasive as to alter the conditions of membership and create an abusive organizing environment. See *Meritor Sav. Bank, FSB v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57, 67 (1986). Whether harassment is severe enough to reach this level is determined by whether a reasonable person would be offended by the conduct. See *id.* at 77. Further, in evaluating the severity and pervasiveness of harassment under this standard, DSA representatives should focus on the perspective of the victim. See *Ellison v. Brady*, 924 F.2d 872, 878 (9th Cir. 1991). This means critically analyzing, among other things, the different perspectives of those in a protected class. See *id.*

- i. Receive, acknowledge receipt of, and archive accuser reports;
 - 1. Contact the accused to notify them of the accusations, request their written response, and archive any written response;
 - ii. Conduct any necessary investigation of the claim; and
 - iii. Present their findings to the Chapter Committee with a written report and, if necessary, a recommendation for disciplinary action.
 - iv. If necessary, HGO(s) may recommend that parties do not contact each other for the duration of the investigative process.
 - v. Compile a yearly report that details:
 - 1. How many reports were made.
 - 2. How many were taken to the disciplinary process.
 - 3. How many disciplinary actions were taken.
 - 4. Any recommended changes for making the reporting system more effective.
 - 5. This report will not include personally identifying information of any parties in any dispute. The local HGO(s) will send the yearly report to the national HGO(s) no later than January 1 of the new year.
 - vi. Archive reports, responses, and other relevant documents indefinitely, transferring them to their successor(s), with the same duties applying as for transferral of steering body records.
 - 1. If at any point the HGO position(s) are completely vacant, the past HGO(s) shall have custody of records until new HGO(s) are selected, but are prohibited from inspecting them.
 - 2. In the case that no past HGO(s) are available to handle custody of records, the national HGO(s) shall assume this responsibility.
- b. **Election process.** At least two members shall be elected to serve as the designated HGO(s).
- i. The Chapter Committee shall open a call for chapter members to self-nominate for the position of HGO.
 - 1. The call for self-nominations will occur no later than five weeks before the election date to allow sufficient time for the vetting process to occur as outlined in section 2ci.
 - 2. The call for self-nominations will be open for two weeks.
 - ii. Self-nominees must undergo a vetting process as outlined in section 2c.
 - iii. Voting for HGO positions will be on a date out of sync with officer elections.
 - iv. HGO(s) must meet the following qualifications:
 - 1. 50% of the HGO(s) must be non-majority race and/or not cis men.
 - a. If this criteria cannot be met, interim HGO(s) can be appointed by the Chapter Committee until criteria is met.
 - 2. HGO(s) cannot be Chapter co-chairs or at-large officers.

- c. **Vetting process.** Each HGO self-nominee must go through a vetting process before an election takes place.
- i. The vetting process must be completed within three weeks from the date of self-nomination.
 - ii. The persons carrying out the vetting process will be the current HGO(s). If current HGO(s) do not exist, the Chapter Committee will complete the vetting process.
 - iii. Each nominee will:
 1. provide a candidate statement; list any relevant experience (first responder training, active bystander training, etc.); one or more character references, and
 2. submit to an interview with one or more persons carrying out the the vetting process.
 - iv. The person(s) carrying out the vetting process will:
 1. Interview the nominee using the following questions. The answers to these questions will be recorded in writing during the interview and signed by the nominee and the interviewer(s). The recorded answers will be archived along with other HGO documents.
 - a. What is your interest in being a harassment grievance officer?
 - b. As harassment is defined in the bylaws:
 - i. Has anyone filed a complaint of harassment against you?
 - ii. Have you been charged with harassment?
 - iii. Has anyone accused you of harassment?
 - c. What experience or qualities do you believe will make you a good HGO?
 - d. Are you willing to attend additional training?
 2. Contact the character reference and corroborate the nominee's character and behaviour.
 3. Verify the nominee's relevant experience (certificates, to the fullest extent possible, using documentation such as certificates, attendance records, or contact with the trainer(s) or host organization(s).
 4. Using the information available, determine whether the nominee should proceed to the election process.
 - a. Reasons for not recommending a nominee can include convictions or charges related to incidents of harassment or that the nominee has knowingly misled the vetting group or deliberately omitted information during the vetting process.

- b. The persons doing the vetting must reach full consensus to allow a nominee to proceed to election.

d. Recall process. HGO(s) may be recalled at the discretion of the other HGO(s):

- i. If the HGO(s) have committed any omissions or falsehoods on any materials submitted or collected during the vetting process listed in section 2c in which case the HGO is suspended from all duties pending investigation by the other HGO(s).
- ii. If the HGO(s) are not completing HGO duties in a timely manner as defined in section 2a.
- iii. As part of a remedy or penalty delivered by the Chapter Committee as outlined section 3.

3. Reporting procedure and timeline

- a. An email address that is established and only accessible by the HGO(s) will function as a confidential reporting “hotline”.
 - i. This is currently hgo.svdsa@gmail.com as of Jul 1, 2025 .
- b. A confidential template form (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1YGZlftsaZGCvtPY2HN4sVb91CakMTilfvLKiZfiOo0/viewform>) maintained by the HGO(s) will be submitted for both reporting and responding to accusations of harassment, which includes:
 - i. The parties’ contact information
 - ii. The names of the parties involved
 - iii. A description of reported incident
- c. If there is more than one HGO, the HGOs must provide a mechanism for contacting and reporting to just a subset of the HGOs.
- d. A confidential template form for appealing the form of relief will be submitted, which includes:
 - i. The grounds of the appeal
- e. After a written report has been submitted--whether through the email hotline or otherwise:
 - i. The HGO(s) responsible for the reporting channel used by the accuser will contact the accused member within seven days to notify them that a report has been filed against them and of the contents of the report, except parts the accuser has requested remain confidential, and request a written response to the report either affirming or denying its substance;
 - ii. The accused will submit their written response within seven days of being notified. HGO may extend deadline in extraordinary circumstances. If the accused does not meet this deadline, the HGO will recommend the Chapter Committee move to take appropriate disciplinary action;
 - iii. If the accused denies the substance of the report, the HGO overseeing the dispute will have the option to investigate the report by:

1. interviewing other members with direct knowledge of the substance of the report;
 2. requesting documentation from either the accuser or accused or any other parties directly involved; or
 3. employing any and all other means deemed necessary, with the utmost respect for the confidentiality of the parties, within a time period not to exceed ten days.
- f. The HGO(s) responsible for adjudicating the dispute will determine whether the report is credible and, if necessary, make a recommendation to Chapter Committee of appropriate disciplinary action as soon as practicable, but ultimately within thirty days of the report being filed. This is to ensure the timely, efficient, accurate, and discreet adjudication of all reports. The HGO(s) may notify Chapter Committee of the accuser's report and its substance at any time after the report is filed, but must give written notice to both the accuser and the accused member before doing so.
- g. An HGO must recuse themselves if:
- i. they are accused in the report
 - ii. they are unable to form an impartial decision
- h. The HGO(s) may be recused at the discretion of the other HGO(s) if the accuser or another party aware of the accusation requests it.
- i. A person submitting a report may send it instead to the DSA National Harassment Grievance Officer (NHGO) through this intake form (<https://tinyurl.com/national-HGO>).
- 4. Remedies and penalties**
- a. Determinations**
- i. All reports will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the HGO(s) and Chapter Committee associated with the accuser's reporting channel. The ultimate disposition of each report will be made by the Chapter Committee or, in the case of DSA National, the NPC, after that body reviews the written report and recommendation of the HGO(s).
 - ii. If a Chapter Committee member is named in the report, that Committee member must recuse themselves from the determination process.
- b. Standard for Determining if a Report is Credible**
- i. The Chapter Committee or, in the case of DSA National, the NPC will find the factual allegation in a report is "credible" if it more-likely-than-not occurred.
- c. Penalties and Remedies**
- i. If the Chapter Committee finds the report to be credible, they are authorized to carry out the following remedies and penalties:

1. A formal discussion between the accused and the Chapter Committee to develop a plan to change the harassing behavior(s);
 2. Suspension from committee meetings and other chapter or organizational events;
 3. Removal from chapter working group(s), committee(s), caucus(es), or appointed positions;
 4. Recall referendum from an officer position following the majority threshold defined in the Chapter Bylaws;
 5. Removal from DSA as defined in the Chapter Bylaws; and
 6. Any and all other relief deemed necessary and just by the chapter or national leadership.
- ii. In the case of DSA National, if the NPC finds the report to be credible, they are authorized to carry out the following remedies and penalties of the DSA Constitution and the DSA Bylaws:
 1. Removal from DSA; and
 2. Any and all other relief deemed necessary and just by the chapter or national leadership.
 - iii. The appropriate form of relief will be determined by, among other things:
 1. The request of the accuser;
 2. The severity of the offense;
 3. The response of the accused; and
 4. The accused's relevant behavioral histories.
- d. **Appeals process.** Either party may appeal the form of relief determined by Chapter Committee by filling out appellate form (<https://tinyurl.com/harassment-reporting-form>) created by the accuser's reporting channel. Appeals must be filed within thirty days of receiving written notice of the Chapter Committee's decision. The limited grounds for appeal are:
- i. Either party believes the behavior was not interpreted using the standards for harassment set out in Section 1a;
 - ii. Procedural errors, misconduct, or conflicts of interest affected the fairness of the outcome; and
 - iii. The remedy or penalty determined by Chapter Committee was grossly disproportionate to the violation committed
- e. **Retaliation.** This policy prohibits retaliation against any member for bringing a complaint of harassment pursuant to this policy. This policy also prohibits retaliation against a person who assists someone with a complaint of harassment, or participates in any manner in an investigation or resolution of a complaint of discrimination or harassment. Retaliatory behaviors includes threats, intimidation, reprisals, and/or adverse actions related to organizing. If any party to the complaint believes there has been retaliation, they may inform the HGO who

will determine whether to factor the retaliation into the original complaint, or treat it as an individual incident.

Change Log

Note: Most major changes to this policy should be approved by membership via resolution. The following changes were more administrative in nature.

August 3, 2025: Updated to remove references to the Branch structure, which was removed in [this Bylaws amendment](#).

July 14, 2025: Updated to add the new HGO report Google Form.

July 1, 2025: Updated to add the new HGO email.

September 8, 2018: Updated to replace an outdated reference to South Bay DSA.