



OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE INSPECTOR GENERAL

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*****FOUNDED SUMMARY REPORT – CONFIDENTIAL*****

June 30, 2026

Honorable Emanuel “Chris” Welch
Speaker of the House of Representatives
300 Capitol Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Re: LIG Case No. 26-005

Dear Speaker Welch,

This summary report of investigation is issued pursuant to Section 25-50(a) of the State Officials and Employee Ethics Act, 5 ILCS 430.

On March 4, 2026, The Office of the Legislative Inspector General (LIG) received a complaint that alleged improper conduct rising to sexual harassment by Illinois State Representative Harry Benton.

Following my extensive investigation, I have concluded that Representative Harry Benton during 2025 and 2026 engaged in inappropriate conduct which rises to the level of sexual harassment in violation of state law.

Sexual Harassment is prohibited in Illinois by the Illinois Human Rights Act which makes it a civil rights violation for any employee to engage in sexual harassment. 775 ILCS 5/2-102(d), Representative Harry Benton is a State Representative, a Member of the General Assembly and thus is an employee of the State of Illinois.

The Illinois General Assembly does not tolerate sexual harassment and has determined that any form of sexual harassment has a detrimental influence in the workplace by creating a hostile environment, reduces productivity, and increases legal liability.

Sexual Harassment Training

Rep. Harry Benton was elected to office in November 2022. Prior to being sworn in as a member of the General Assembly, he attended the COGFA New Members' Conference in Springfield on November 29, 2022. COGFA invited the LIG and Rep. Maurice West, Chairman of the Legislative Ethics Commission to attend and address the new members with Harry Benton present. When I interviewed Rep. Benton on Friday, May 29, 2026 in his lawyer's law office, he acknowledged that he and his office staff must take the Ethics and Sexual Harassment Training within 30 days after employment and each year thereafter. Rep. Benton said those tasks were timely completed by him and his office staff in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Benton said he could not remember if he had completed the training this year. His statement about this year's training is irrelevant because the annual training language has been the same for many years and Rep. Benton said he had taken the Sexual Harassment Training in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Examples of Inappropriate Conduct Becoming Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Examples include:

- Pressure to sexual favors or to go out on a date
- Deliberate touching, leaning over, or cornering another person
- Sexual looks or gestures
- Sending letters, telephone calls, e-mails, texts, or other materials of a sexual nature
- Sexual teasing, jokes, remarks
- Referring to another as "hot," "doll," "babe," "honey," "sweetie," "sugar," or similar expressions.

History of Inappropriate Conduct of a Sexual Nature

Several examples of inappropriate conduct rising to sexual harassment by Rep. Harry Benton occurred shortly after he was sworn in as a Member of the General Assembly in 2023. The victim never filed a complaint with me as the LIG, but she stated in writing that she didn't want anything further to do with Rep. Benton after she resigned his district office employment in June 2023. I must address his conduct which is part of the complaint filed March 4, 2026. The conduct alleged in the complaint is part of a pattern and practice of inappropriate sexual conduct by Rep. Benton which began shortly after he took his initial sexual harassment training in early 2023 and has continued throughout his tenure in the General Assembly.

The one-year statute of limitations has run on this portion of the complaint filed on March 4, 2026 pursuant to Section 25-20(1) of the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act. However, it is outrageous to think that the LIG and Chair of the Legislative Ethics Commission

would address a new member of the General Assembly about ethics and sexual harassment and have that member shortly thereafter begin a pattern and practice of sexual harassment against the first woman he hired in his district office in 2023.

Pattern and Practice of Sexual Harassment by Rep. Harry Benton

On April 14, 2023, a district office employee of Rep. Benton sent a lengthy email to Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch’s Chief of Staff detailing acts of sexual harassment by Harry Benton. The email started in part as follows; “I do want this documented as several women work for him if something were to happen in the future.” The employee further said “I am leaning towards just getting this on the record and not doing much more with it.” The email would thereafter detail many odd statements made to the employee as well as many statements of direct sexual harassment.

During the first week of employment, Rep. Benton said to her “The reason I ran for office was to get away from my wife.” During her three-hour job interview Rep. Benton “asked me to be vulnerable.” In early February 2023, Benton said to the employee the following dress attire comment “make sure you don’t forget to wear something underneath that.” On February 9, 2023, she documented this conversation “asked to stay at my friend’s condo with me in the city, put me in an extremely awkward situation having to say no to him.” Also in February, 2023, she said Benton “sent me a picture of an OnlyFans model on accident? He asked me to send it back.” Benton then said, “Makes me feel better now I have this on you.” My investigation revealed that OnlyFans is a well-known social media platform for pornographic content. When the employee requested a webcam for district office zoom meetings, Benton responded “why, so you can double dip in the office?” His comment refers to using a webcam for pornographic content which is what women on OnlyFans offer to subscribers. Undeterred, in early March, Rep. Benton told the employee, “See, I’m doing a good service, I am keeping you off the pole with this job.” This comment references the pole dancers at a strip club. At a dinner with a lobbyist during this same time frame, Benton said about this employee, “She will do, she was the cheapest.” In Springfield, in front of staff, employee stated a conversation in March; “I said my boyfriend was taking me to the gun range. He responded (referring to Rep. Benton) ‘Wow, you’re going to let him take you instead of me?’

It doesn’t take but a cursory reading of the April 14, 2023 E-mail documentation from the complaining district office employee to see a very early pattern and practice of sexual harassment by Rep. Harry Benton. The Chief of Staff and the Ethics Officer for the Speaker’s Office decided to confront Benton with these allegations after the district employee resigned in June 2023 to avoid retaliation by Benton if he found out who filed the complaint.

The Zoom meeting to discuss the former district office employee’s complaint was conducted on July 20, 2023 or on a date close to that date. On July 19, 2023 the employee emailed the Chief of Staff indicating that Rep. Benton had invited the employee to join the Zoom meeting. It is very interesting that Benton did this even though he had always taken the position that the complaint did not come from his office staff and was only based on rumor. The

employee did not participate in the Zoom meeting and wrote in the July 19th email "I want to note that I will not pursue any further actions beyond this. The reason I reported this was for the protection of the other women in the office."

On July 20, 2023 the Chief of Staff emailed the complaining employee the following; "I would still encourage you to consider filing a report with the LIG; note that the statute of limitation is 1 year after the most recent alleged violation or of a series of alleged violation. So, while there is a SOL (Statute of Limitations), there is still time if you do change your mind after further distance after leaving the Office. Know that we reiterated the severity of retaliation and/or intimidation and will continue to do so. As promised to you, your name or identifying situation will never be used (unless you tell me otherwise). As always, reach out any time."

During my investigation, the employee who made the complaint has never contacted me. I have been the LIG since February 2022. Also, I have talked to the Former Chief of Staff and Ethics Officer who said the former employee has never contacted either of them since July 20, 2023. During my investigation I obtained the phone number and email address of the former employee and I have attempted to contact her, but received no response to date.

On May 29, 2026, I interviewed Representative Harry Benton regarding the April 14, 2023 email and the July 2023 Zoom Meeting. He denied ever saying or doing anything of a sexual nature that I have set forth in this summary report or ever attempted to sexually harass anyone.

Even though the one-year statute of limitations has passed on this portion of the March 4, 2026 complaint, I include it as a matter of pattern and practice of sexual harassment occurring during the entirety of Harry Benton's career as a member of the General Assembly. This statement is made in this summary report because as LIG, it is my opinion and the opinion of my veteran investigator that Harry Benton was not credible during the entirety of our interview with him at his lawyer's office in Springfield on May 29, 2026.

These Claims Alleged in Complaint as Unfounded

1. The complaint filed March 4, 2026 with my office also alleged that Rep. Harry Benton acted inappropriately at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield during the summer of 2024. Note this is more than year after the claimed misconduct that Benton was hostile by attempting to get on the stage with the Governor and his team. Because this claim is barred by the statute of limitations and has nothing to do with sexual harassment, I find the claim to be unfounded.
2. Another claim the complaint alleges is from an event Rep. Benton attended in Chicago in December 2025. I did investigate this matter. I interviewed a state representative who was present at the event and a leader of the AFL-CIO who received a complaint from [REDACTED]. The complaint was that Harry Benton harassed and was hostile to a staffer of the Illinois Federation of Teachers. The bottom line of my investigation was that Rep. Benton engaged the IFT staffer in a heated argument over school funding. Benton argued that Chicago received too much

school funding and did a poor job teaching students. As a former high school teacher and coach, I can envision the loud and hostile argument between the two. However, this exchange which is political in nature did not involve improper sexual comments or sexual harassment. Moreover, when I interviewed Rep. Benton, he did not deny the exchange. While it was not a good way to win friends or influence people, it was purely a political argument and not sexual harassment. Accordingly, I dismiss this claim as unfounded.

3. The most difficult claim to corroborate in the March 4, 2026 complaint is due to hearsay. The complaint alleged that Rep. Harry Benton had pictures on his cell phone of women in various stages of undress which he claimed to be involved with romantically. Every woman member of the General Assembly I interviewed said they had heard about the pictures on Benton's cell phone, but could not identify anyone who saw the pictures. Female members I interviewed said that the indecent pictures were shown at a Chicago Bulls game hosted by a lobbyist. No female members of the General Assembly were in attendance. Several male members present said that Benton was not there. When interviewed, Benton denied ever going to a Bulls game hosted by a lobbyist or ever having indecent pictures of women on his cell phone.

I thought I was getting close to valuable information when interviewing a female member of the House. She said that a male member of the House told her that while he was at the Bulls game Rep. Benton was showing indecent pictures of women and claiming to be sleeping with the women shown in his cell phone. When I interviewed that male member of the House, he denied being at the Bulls game or ever seeing Harry Benton show any pictures of women on his cell phone. Without any names from anyone about lobbyists who may have information of interest, my investigation in this claim came to end with only hearsay. Accordingly, this claim is dismissed as unfounded.

The Only Claims from the Complaint Which Are Founded

1. A district director of a [REDACTED] district office filed a complaint with her [REDACTED] that Rep. Harry Benton had sexually harassed her in a bar in Springfield following the [REDACTED] Latino Unity Day Festivities. While the district director was at the [REDACTED] Rep. Benton approached her and leaned over her and put his hand on her back. She said that made her feel very uncomfortable. He began a conversation by lamenting that [REDACTED] County elected Officials disliked him. He continued to lean over her while touching her back. She then backed away from him because he made her feel uneasy. She said he was creepy. An individual came to intervene and stood between the district director and Benton. When I interviewed Rep. Benton, he denied that any of this ever occurred. I found the district director to be credible. Both leaning over someone and leaning in too close are considered sexual harassment when it is unwelcomed conduct. This late-night bar encounter with Rep. Benton touching her back caused the district director to feel Benton was acting creepy and caused her to pull away and require the assistance of an individual to step in between her and Benton. This example of unwanted behavior is clearly taught in sexual harassment training and was ignored by Rep. Benton. I find this claim of sexual harassment to be founded.

2. I will now address the final allegation in the March 4, 2026 complaint against Rep. Harry Benton. A registered female lobbyist reported this incident to the Speaker's Office and it has been referred to me for investigation as the LIG. I interviewed the lobbyist, Representative Harry Benton and a male state representative. All three were present and talking together in a bar in early January or February of this year. The lobbyist when interviewed, told me that Representative Benton said to her "You know, I might be a 5, but I fuck like a 10. You want to get out of here and have some fun?" The lobbyist said that comment made her shocked and disgusted. She said she immediately turned to the male state representative nearby and said to him "What are you going to do about your boy?" The state representative responded, "What do you want me to do about it" He is always like this." When I interviewed the male state representative, he said he was a friend of Rep. Benton and a friend of the lobbyist and was present at the bar. He confirmed what the lobbyist said to him and what he replied to her. He told me that she appeared very angry because of whatever Harry said to her. He told me he could not confirm what Benton said word for word because he wasn't that close to their conversation. When I confronted Rep. Benton during our interview on May 29, 2026, he denied the entire incident and said it didn't happen. Moreover, he threw in this statement, "I don't hit on lobbyists." My veteran investigator who was present with me during the interview said, "I believe he lied." I responded that I know he lied as well because I have interviewed all three individuals in person and I believe the lobbyist and the bystander are truthful. Accordingly, this allegation in the complaint is founded.

Conclusion

As I have set forth above, it is clear to me as the Legislative Inspector General based on my investigation, that State Representative Harry Benton has violated state law by committing two separate acts of sexual harassment. The fact that these violations are only misdemeanors and may be considered minor crimes by some does not mean they should be ignored. Others might argue that these are merely talking crimes at most. Those arguments don't stand up in today's society. People should not be treated as mere objects to tolerate other people's verbal pleasure or jokes. Rep. Benton took the sexual harassment training at least three times in his short legislative career and ignored common sense examples of what not to say and do. Accordingly, punishment must be imposed by the Speaker of the House who is the ultimate jurisdictional authority in this case.

Recommendations

I understand that as Speaker of the House you have imposed interim measures on State Representative Harry Benton while I, as Legislative Inspector General, conduct a formal investigation and review of the complaint filed on March 4, 2026.

The interim measures imposed against Rep. Harry Benton are as follows:

1. He was formally removed from all committee assignments.
2. He was uninvited from House Democratic caucus meetings.
3. He no longer is granted access to the Speaker's Office or staff.

I recommend that all these interim measures be made permanent during the entire term of Rep. Benton's legislative office.

I recommend that the two founded allegations against Rep. Benton be published as well as my introduction, conclusions and recommendations.

I do not recommend publication of the unfounded allegations because two involve the one-year statute of limitations. The other unfounded allegation was not involving sexual misconduct and was only a political argument. The final allegation was unfounded because there was no evidence to support the hearsay claim.

I do not recommend that disciplinary proceedings be taken against Rep. Benton pursuant to Article XII of (House Rule 91) of the ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY because the proceeding in the House would be lengthy and require a Special Session.

Pursuant to Section 25-50 of the Ethics Act, you are required to respond to this summary report in writing within 20 days. Your response is to include a description of corrective action to be taken, including whether you agree with my recommendations.

Sincerely,

Michael P. McCuskey

Michael P. McCuskey
Legislative Inspector General

CC Harry Benton's Attorney

MPM/db