

WHEREAS: Comcast and its subsidiaries are under intense public scrutiny for an alleged failure to protect employees from sexual harassment in the workplace, failing to hold those culpable accountable, and lacking transparency.

In 2017, NBC attracted global attention when it fired “Today” host Matt Lauer for ongoing sexual harassment of employees. In October 2019, Ronan Farrow alleged that NBC covered up accusations against Lauer.

Controversy has focused on NBC’s insistence on conducting an internal investigation led by management, rather than independent advisors. Six presidential candidates have called on the Democratic National Committee to demand Comcast conduct an independent investigation into its toxic culture.

NBC News’ digital editorial staff have voted to form a union, with the NewsGuild of New York, noting “serious questions” about how NBC News has handled workplace sexual misconduct and its “opaque” procedures for “exposing powerful predators.”

This failure to provide a safe workplace extends to Comcast call centers, where employees have described a hostile culture of sexual harassment. In July 2018, Comcast fired three call center employees who filed complaints. One has now filed a complaint at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

Throughout the economy, fear of retaliation in reporting harassment is a particular concern. An EEOC study of harassment in the workplace found that 75 percent of employees who reported some sort of harassment experienced retaliation and that 87 to 94 percent of harassment victims did not file a formal complaint.

Workplace harassment can harm shareholder value. The market capitalization of Wynn Resorts dropped by 3 billion dollars over two days following harassment allegations against CEO Steve Wynn. 21st Century Fox agreed to a 90 million dollar settlement with shareholders who alleged that directors failed to hold accountable senior executives who perpetuated sexual harassment.

Comcast and its subsidiaries rely on consumers to trust their brands. A recent Harvard Business Review study found that a single sexual harassment claim can make a company seem less equitable and more problematic than financial misconduct or fraud and would “be enough to dramatically shape public perception of a company and elicit perceptions of structural unfairness.”

To avoid legal and reputational risk, as the employer of 184,000 workers, Comcast must create a culture of accountability and transparency, and protect employees from harassment and discrimination.

RESOLVED: Shareholders urge the Board of Directors to conduct an independent investigation into and prepare a report (at reasonable expense, omitting confidential and proprietary information) on risks posed by the Company’s failures to prevent workplace sexual harassment.

SUPPORTING STATEMENT: Proponents suggest that the report assess steps Comcast could take to do a better job of holding employees who cause harm accountable, such as integrating metrics on creating a sexual harassment-free workplace into the performance measures of the CEO and senior leadership.