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Tories' New Harassment Policy To Keep Process Behind Closed Doors

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The Conservatives have announced an interim policy to deal with harassment-type complaints for their own MPs and staff that keeps the process firmly behind closed doors and under the control of the party's leadership, The Huffington Post Canada has learned. OTTAWA — The Conservatives have announced an interim policy to deal with harassment-type complaints for their own MPs and staff that keeps the process firmly behind closed doors and under the control of the party's leadership, The Huffington Post Canada has learned.

In an email addressed to caucus colleagues late Tuesday afternoon, Conservative Party Whip John Duncan said recent allegations of personal misconduct, against two — now suspended — male Liberal MPs by two unidentified female MPs, had highlighted the problems that can arise when responding to "events in a politicized atmosphere without clear written procedures in place."

Duncan said the Tories were not waiting for the Board of Internal Economy, a tri-party committee that administers the Commons — for which he is the spokesperson — to come up with a general policy for all parties to deal with allegations of misconduct.

Although stressing the "importance of internal processes that focus on prevention and informal conflict resolution where appropriate," Duncan wrote that "formal complaints of workplace harassment, whether of a sexual nature or otherwise, should immediately be brought to my attention."

Faced with a formal complaint, Duncan would immediately speak with relevant parties, he wrote in an email obtained by HuffPost.

"Where it is required, I will take steps to protect a complainant while the matter is investigated, and I will determine whether to engage the services of an independent third-party investigator to provide me with an assessment of facts and recommendations on remedial action."

As a precaution, Duncan said, the Conservatives have entered into an agreement to hire employment lawyer Erin Kuzz of the Toronto firm [Sherrard Kuzz LLP](#).

Duncan said the Tories' policy would allow serious allegations of harassment to be dealt with in a confidential, fair and timely manner through a process in which all parties can have confidence. He said he would also be writing directly to all staff members employed in members' offices so they could understand how confidential formal complaints could be made.

The new policy received mixed reviews Tuesday evening — although MPs will certainly discuss it at the party's weekly Wednesday caucus meeting.

One Tory MP told HuffPost that the Conservatives were panicking.

"The government is having a knee-jerk reaction," he said. They are "dictating" policy without any input from staff, he said.

MPs need to sit down with their staff and review the policy, he added. "Not the whip and not PMO."

Another Conservative, however, said he viewed the policy as nothing more than a "stopgap measure."

On Tuesday, Duncan, in his capacity as Board spokesman, told reporters that Liberal MPs Scott Andrews and Massimo Pacetti remain in "limbo" because no one has made a formal complaint.

Both men deny any wrongdoing.

Duncan said the Board could not deal with the undisclosed allegations and had decided to punt the job of establishing a future process to a Commons committee.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau told reporters he suspended the MPs from the party caucus pending an investigation after an NDP MP came to him with "such serious allegations" that he had a "duty to act."

Trudeau booted the men out after meetings with the alleged victims by his own officials and NDP representatives at which the nature of the allegations was discussed.

The NDP's justice critic, Françoise Boivin, told reporters Tuesday that she thought Trudeau should not have suspended his MPs but rather given them a [verbal warning](#).

The Liberals had asked the Speaker of the Commons, Andrew Scheer, to appoint some type of independent third-party to investigate. Scheer, however, suggested Tuesday, according to a Canadian Press report, that while House administration resources and external experts were available, not much could be done unless the involved parties were willing to come together to address the issue.

The Board, which Scheer heads, did agree Tuesday to extend to MPs and their staff resources that are already available to the House of Commons' 1,800 full-time staff, such as the confidential program for informal conflict management resolution, 'Finding Solutions Together.'