

March 28, 2017 News

## Joffe Quoted in Human Resource Executive Online Article

[In the News](#)

Beth Joffe was quoted in a March 28 *Human Resource Executive Online* article titled “No Hugs Allowed?” The article discusses *Zetwick v. the County of Yolo (Calif.)*, a sexual harassment case where a former sergeant alleged that the county sheriff subjected her to unwelcomed hugs. While the initial district court ruling sided with the county, a recent ruling by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that decision and remanded the case for trial next year. From an employer’s perspective, this case brings attention to questions surrounding HR policies regarding hugging in the workplace, and what procedures are needed to reduce the risk of potential claims.

This case also amplifies a broader employee message — that any type of physical contact may be problematic, says Beth Joffe, an attorney at Lane Powell in Seattle.

HR needs to inform employees that physical contact is a privilege, she says, and, due to cultural, gender and religious differences, should generally be avoided in the workplace. However, Joffe stops short at suggesting a no-hugging policy. Instead, she says a company’s anti-harassment policy needs to mention how hugging can be considered indirect harassment and that employees must exercise caution involving all types of physical contact, including excessive handshakes... Being

responsive and respectful of these types of concerns pays dividends.

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