

VSEA 2013 Whistleblower Survey



Survey Overview:

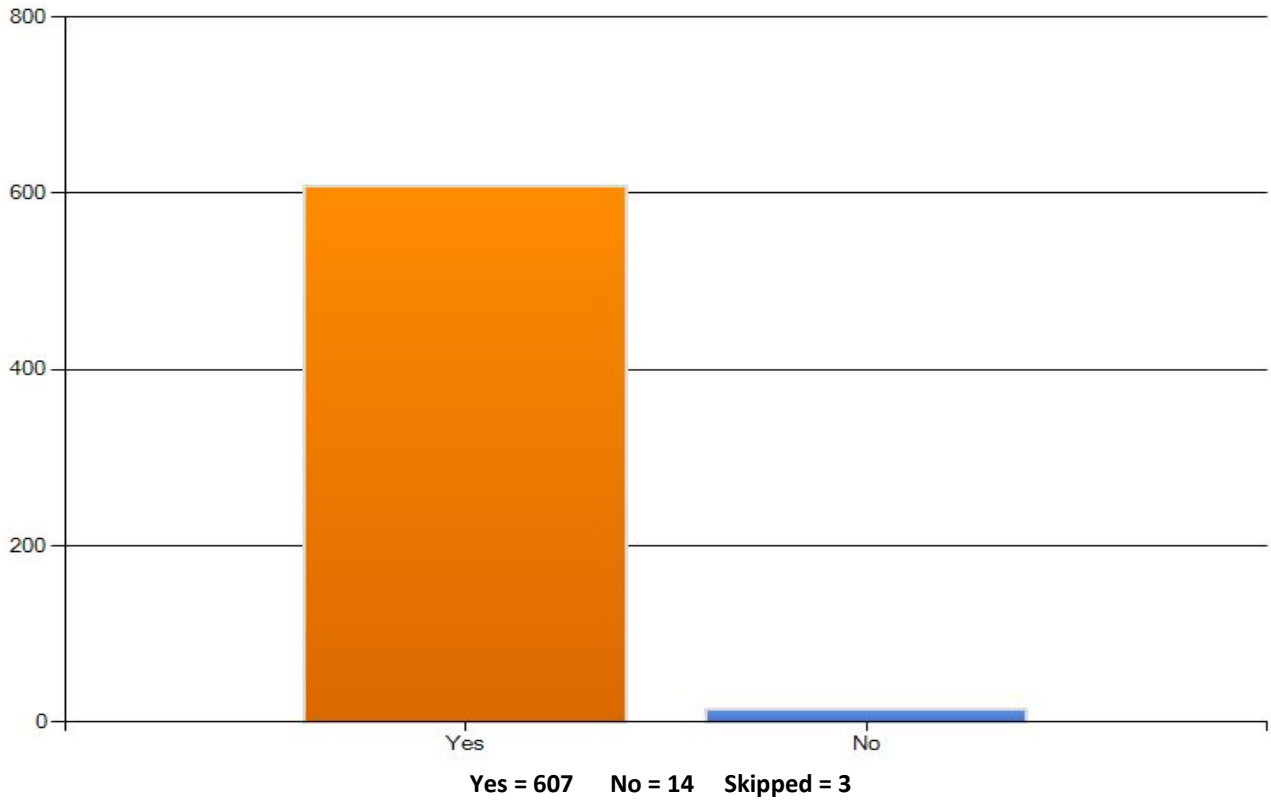
Near the end of the 2012 Vermont legislative session, Vermont State Auditor Doug Hoffer testified to a legislative committee about his desire to protect the identities of state employees who pass on information or tips to his office about problems within state government. He explained that he is currently unable to protect the name of a “whistleblower” because there are no laws right now providing him that authority. Like VSEA, Auditor Hoffer is concerned that many employees are currently afraid to act as whistleblowers because Vermont has not taken the steps necessary to protect a whistleblower’s confidentiality.

In an effort to demonstrate support for the Auditor’s call for whistleblower confidentiality, VSEA issued a survey over the fall to its members to better determine what state employees knew about the practice of workplace whistleblowing, what personal experience they have had with workplace whistleblowing (if any) and how they feel about the level of whistleblower protection that exists today. Their answers, you’ll see, are illuminating.

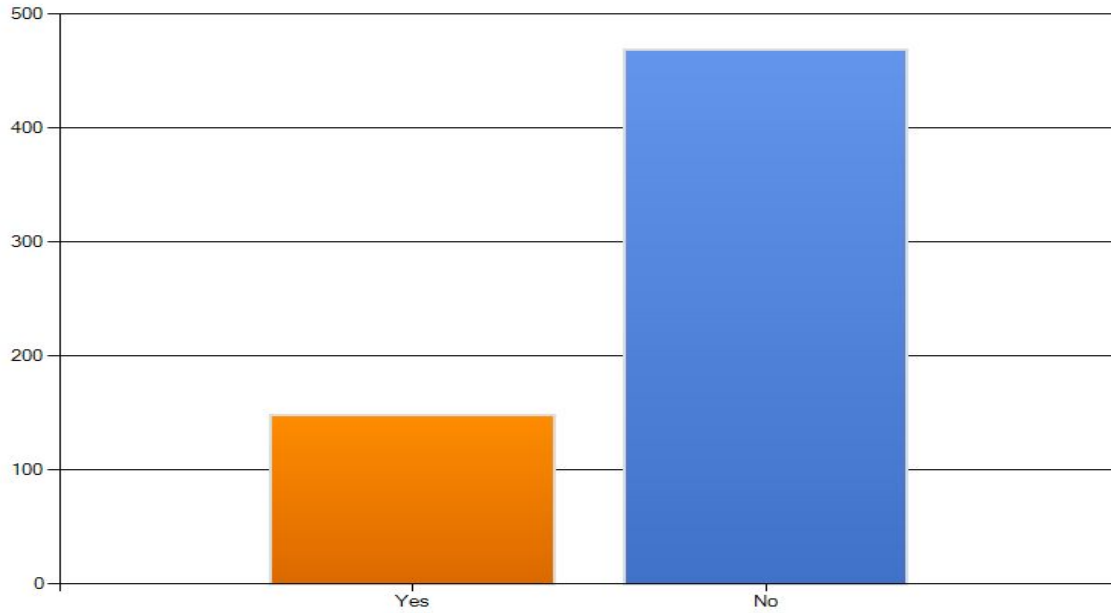


“I had responsibilities taken away. I was pressured to quit. I wasn't afforded the same opportunities—that I was qualified for—that were offered to my peers.”

Are you familiar with the term "whistleblower?"

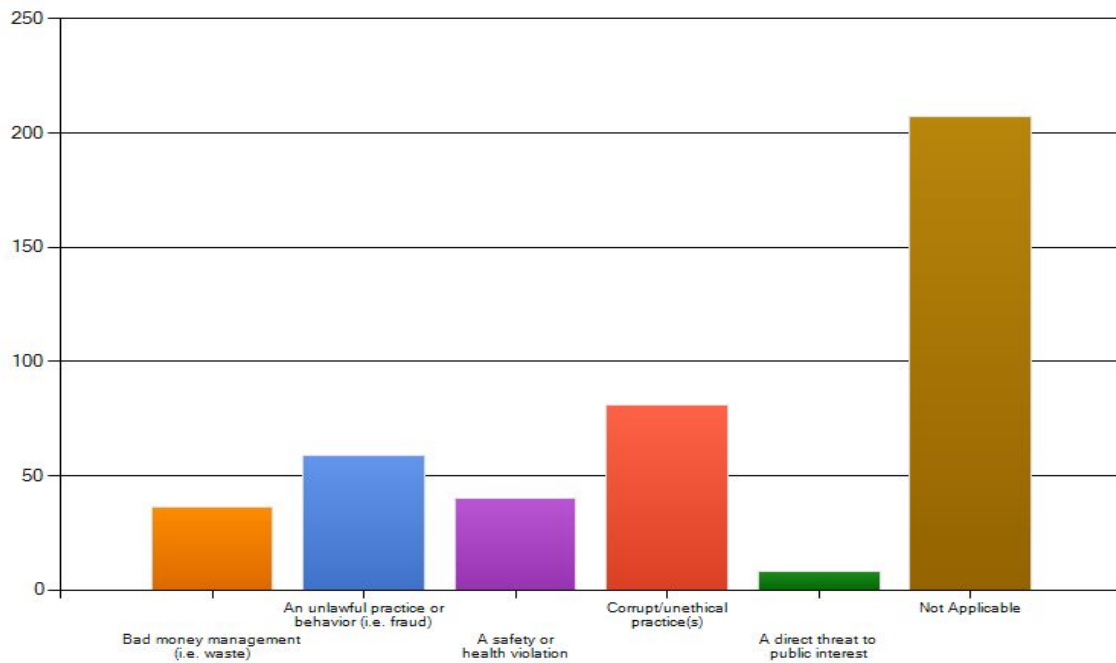


Have you ever been a whistleblower yourself?



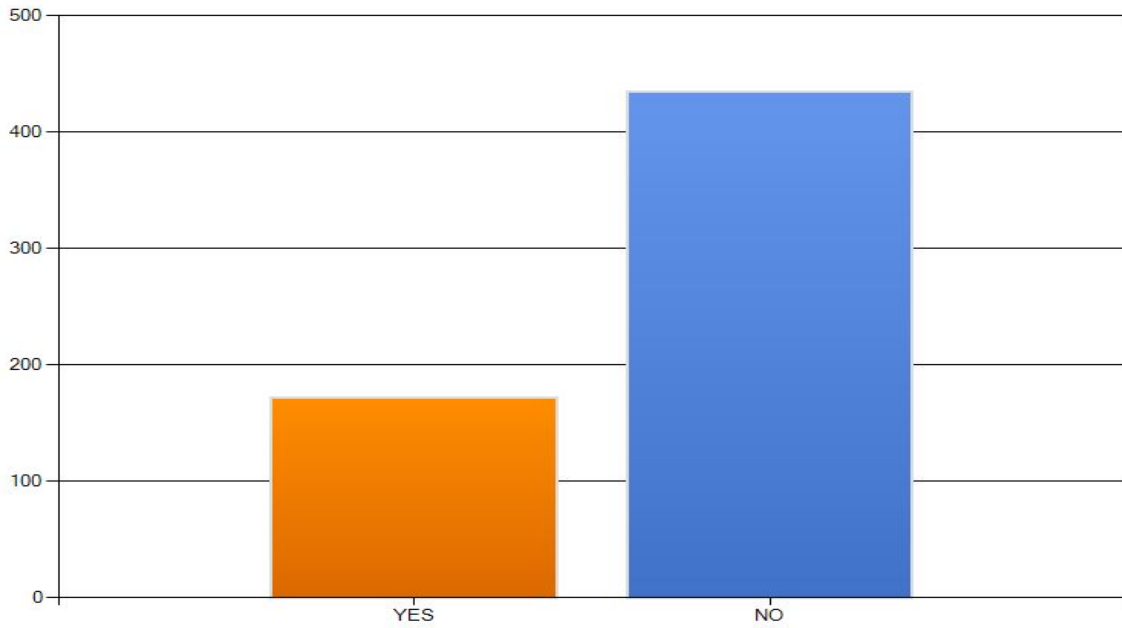
Yes = 607 No = 14 Skipped = 3

If yes, what did you whistleblow about?



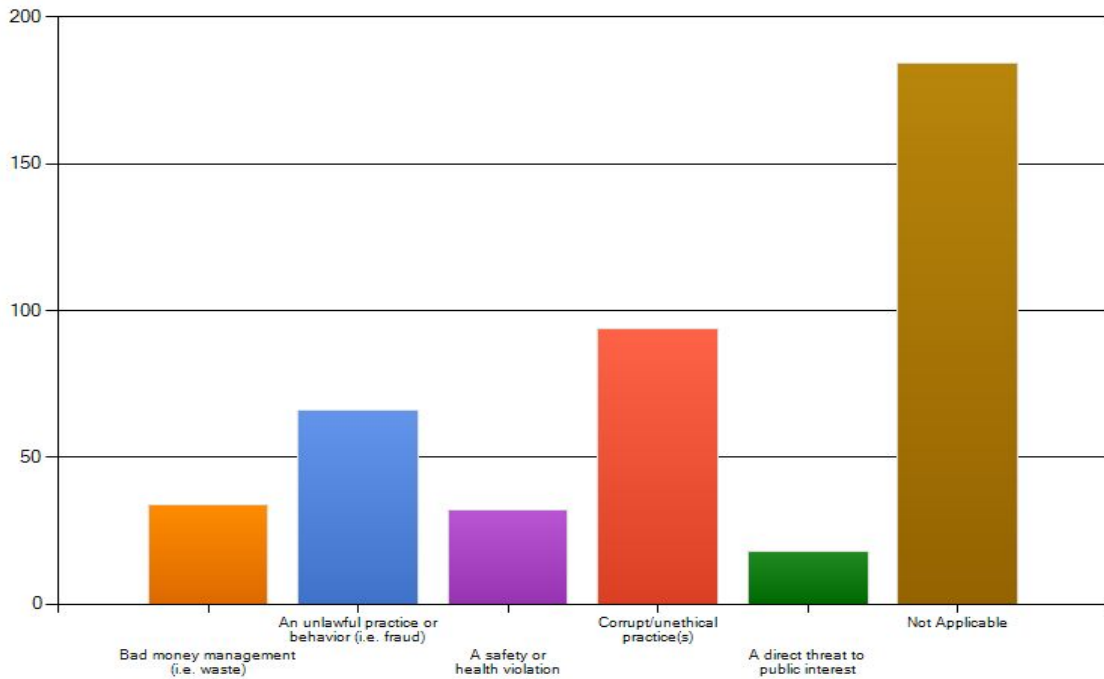
Bad Money Management = 36
An Unlawful Practice or Behavior = 59
A Safety or Health Violation = 40
Corrupt/Unethical Practice = 81
Direct Threat to Public Interest = 8
Not Applicable = 207
Skipped = 280

Have you ever known a state employee who has been whistleblower?



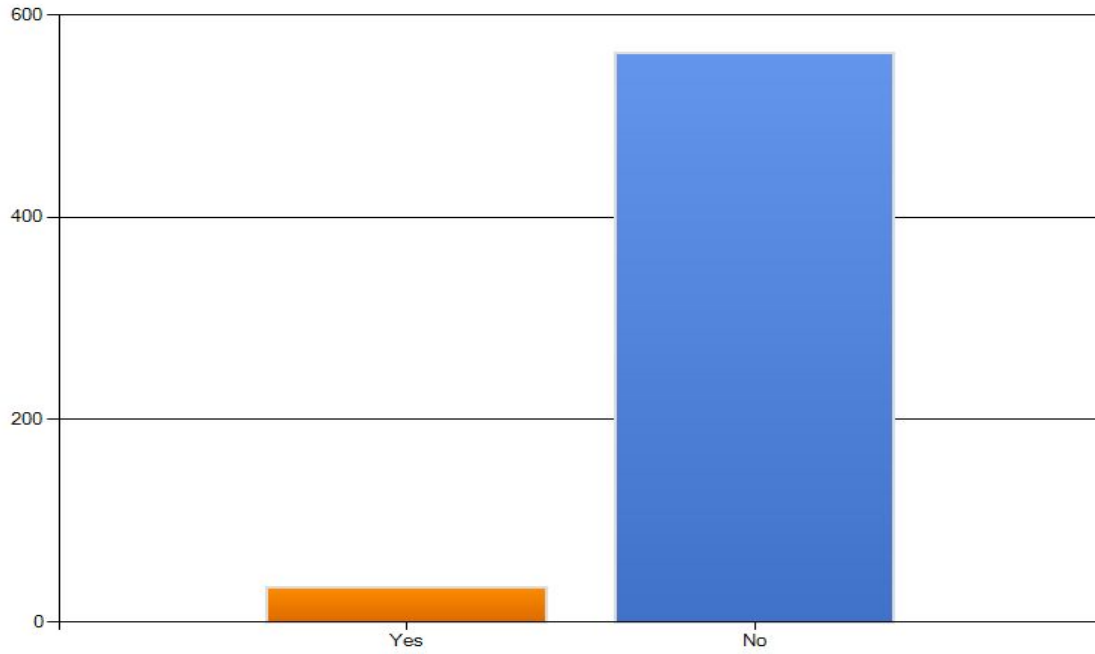
Yes = 171 No = 434 Skipped = 19

If so, what did s/he whistleblow about?



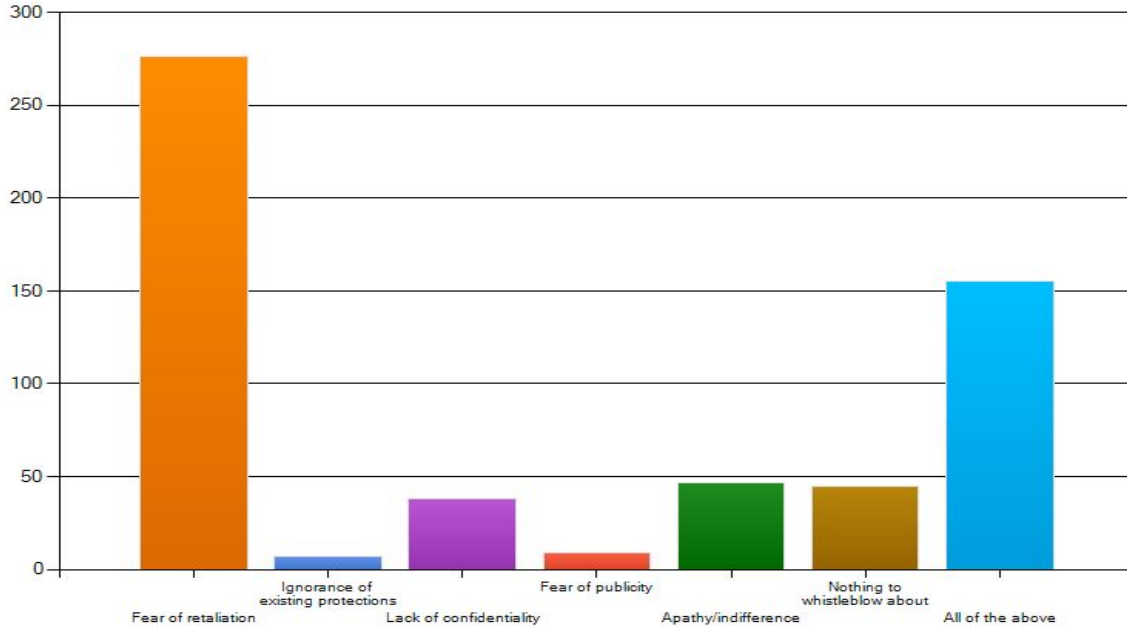
Bad Money Management = 34
An Unlawful Practice or Behavior = 66
A Safety or Health Violation = 32
Corrupt/Unethical Practice = 94
Direct Threat to Public Interest = 18
Not Applicable = 184
Skipped = 285

Do you think there's much whistleblowing in state government right now?



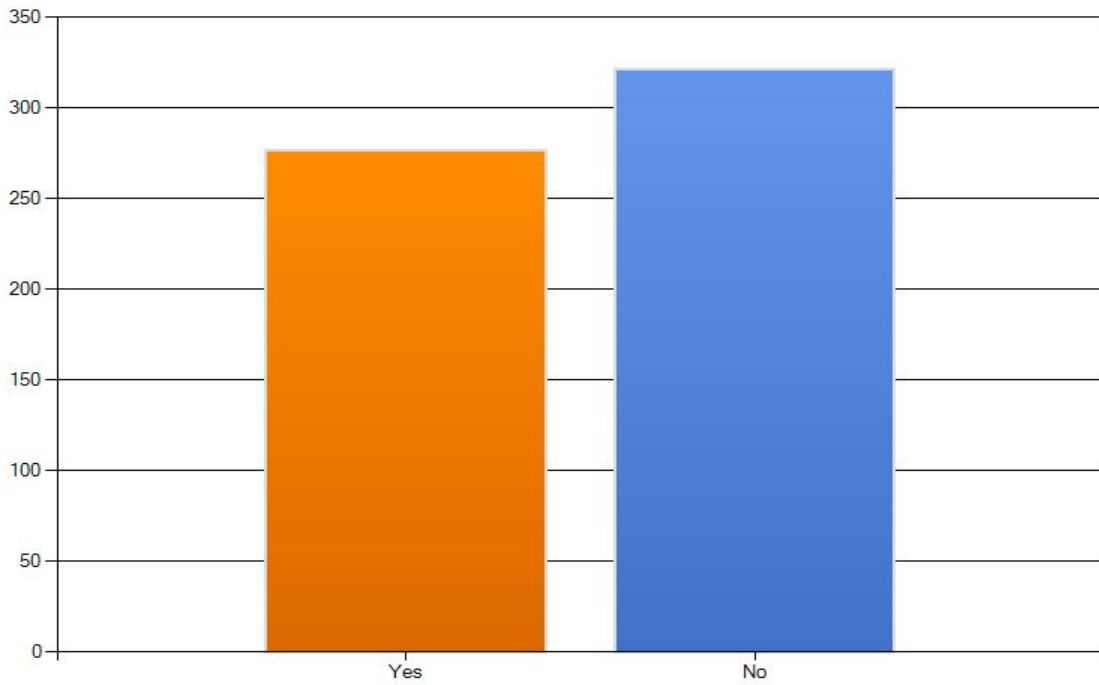
Yes = 34 No = 562 Skipped = 28

If not, what is the primary reason you believe more state employees do not whistleblow?



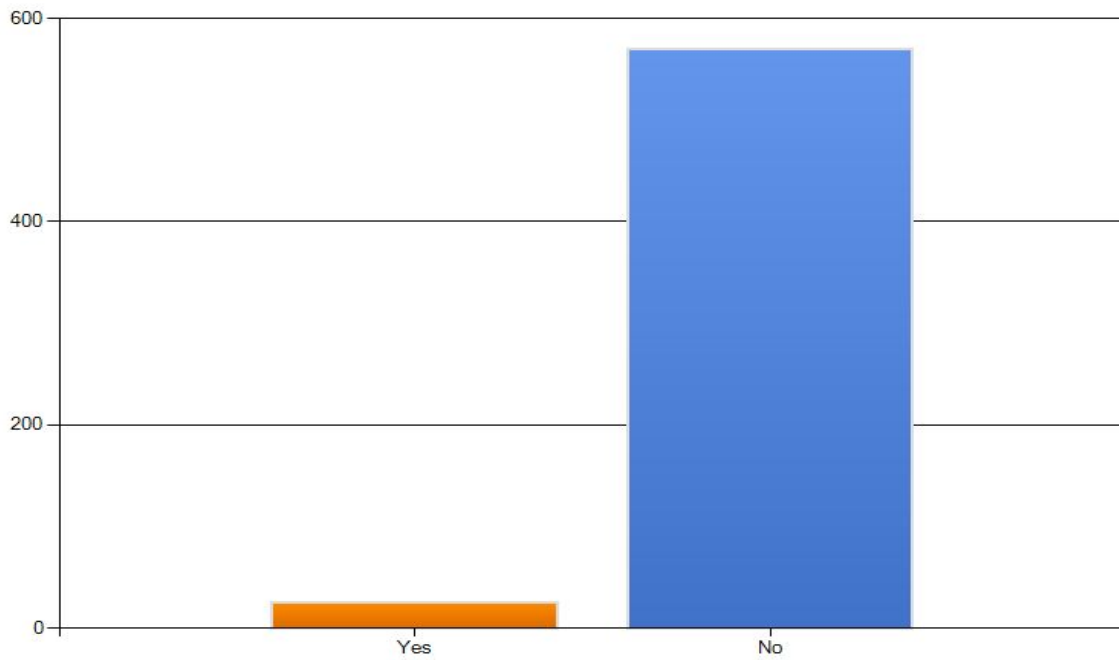
Fear of Retaliation = 276
Ignorance of Existing Protections = 7
Lack of Confidentiality = 38
Fear of Publicity = 9
Apathy/Indifference = 47
Nothing to Whistleblow About = 45
All of Above = 155
Skipped = 47

Are you aware that VSEA championed and help pass legislation (S. 201) in 2007 to protect state employee whistleblowers from retaliation?



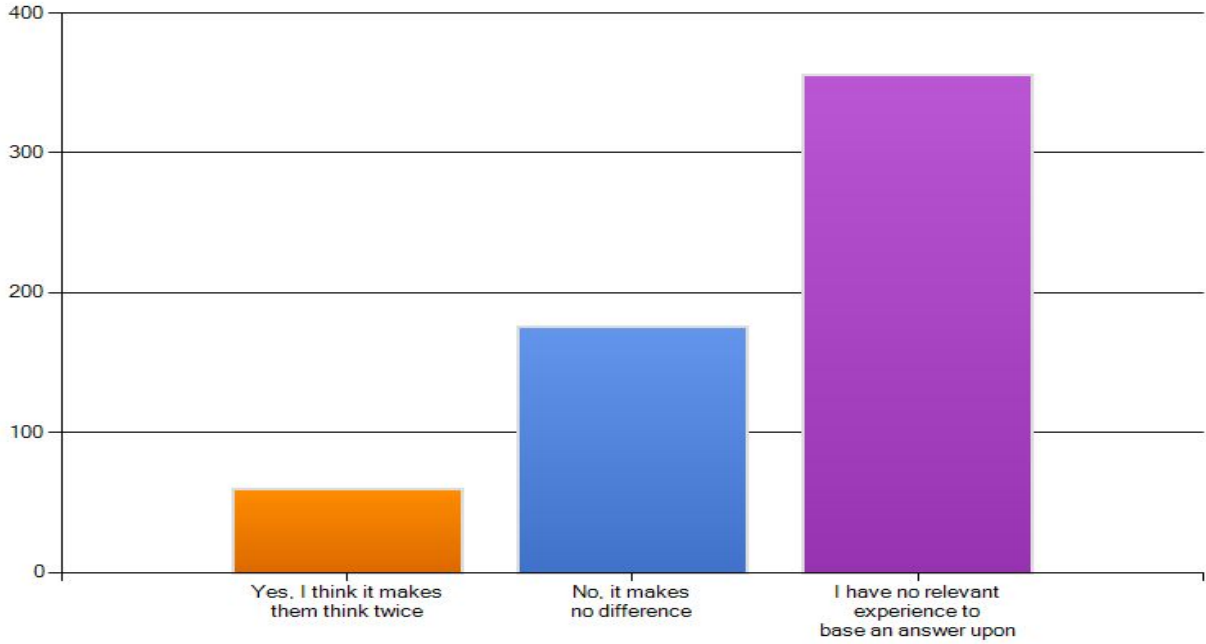
Yes = 276 No = 321 Skipped = 27

Have you, or any state employee you know, ever had to invoke this legislation due to whistleblowing activity?



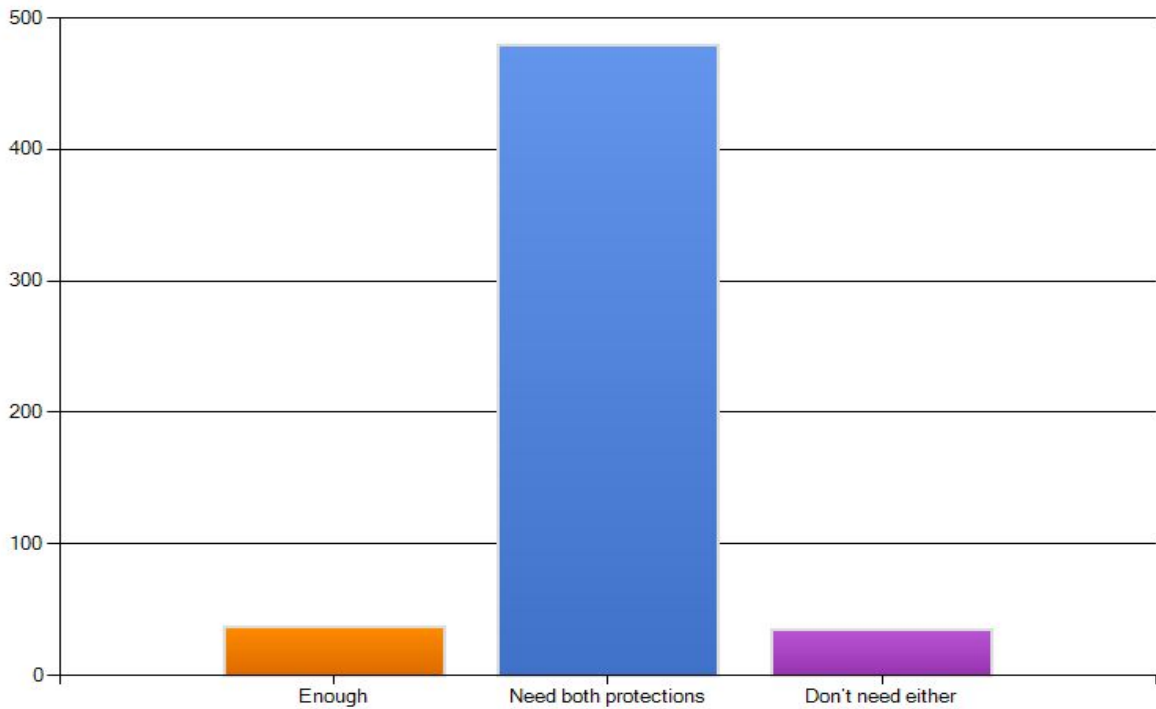
Yes = 24 No = 569 Skipped = 31

Do you believe the language negotiated by VSEA is helping in any way to prevent managers in state government from retaliating, or threatening to retaliate against whistleblowers?



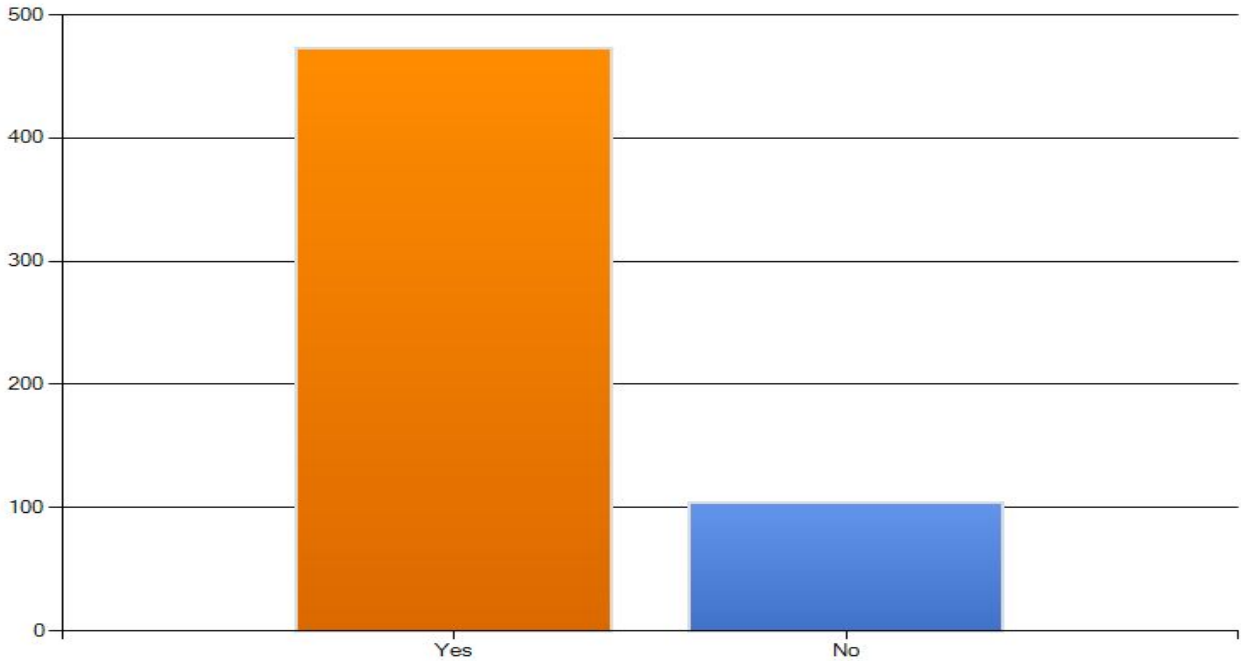
Yes = 59 No = 175 No Relevant Experience = 355 Skipped = 35

Is VSEA's language to prevent whistleblower retaliation enough, or should the language be supplemented with language to protect an employee's identity?



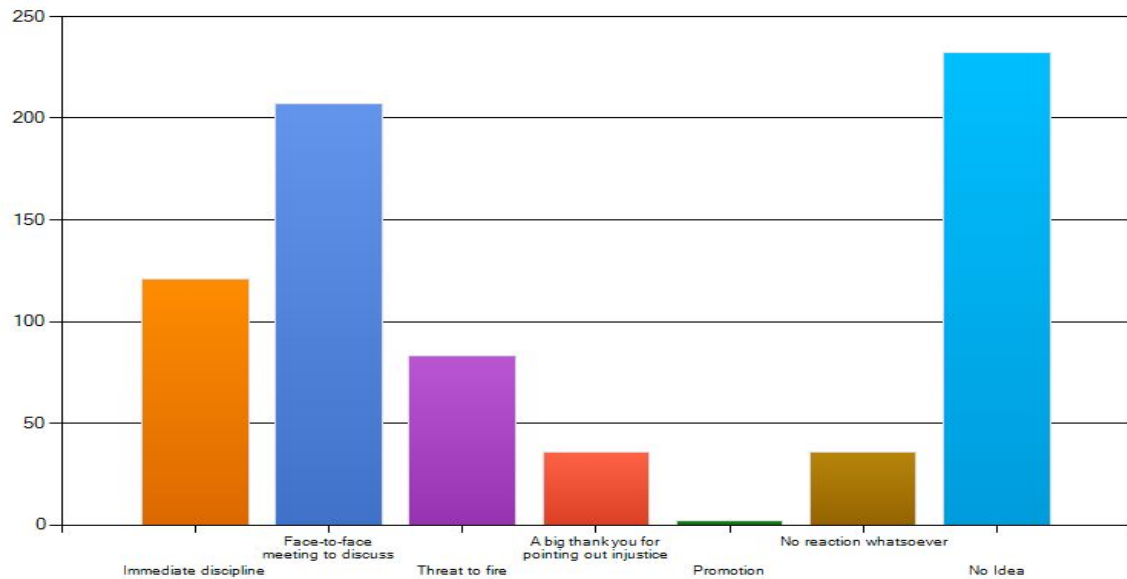
Enough = 36 Need Both Protections = 479 Neither = 34 Skipped = 75

If the Vermont legislature was to include language to protect a whistleblower's identity, would you be more likely to come forward with reports of corruption, unlawful practice, etc?



Yes = 472 No = 103 Skipped = 49

What do you believe the ramifications for you would be if your boss found out you are a whistleblower, or about to whistleblow?



Immediate Discipline = 121

Face-to-Face Meeting to Discuss = 207

Threat to Fire = 83

Big Thank You = 36

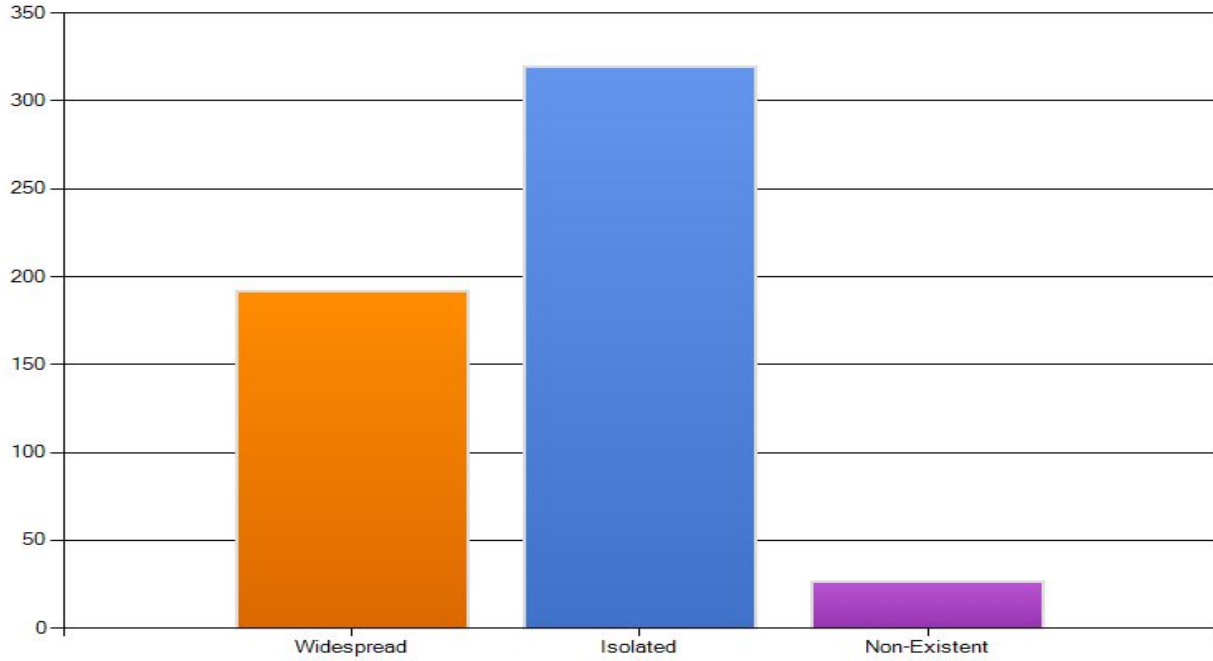
Promotion = 2

No Reaction Whatsoever = 36

No Idea = 232

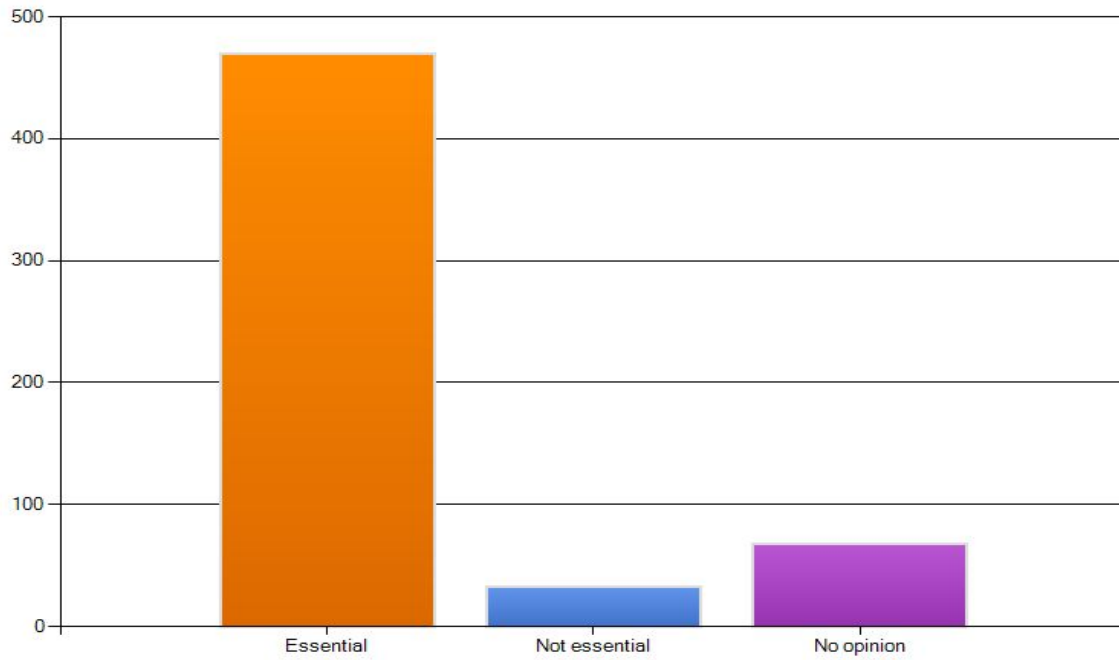
Skipped = 50

Please complete the sentence "Today, retaliation against employees is _____?"



Widespread = 191 Isolated = 319 Non-Existent = 26 Skipped = 88

Please complete the sentence "In my opinion, supplementing employee whistleblowers' protection from retaliation with identity protection is _____"



Essential = 469 Non-Essential = 32 No Opinion = 67 Skipped = 56

Quotes: If you have personally been a whistleblower, please describe the outcome of your whistleblowing action

"My supervisor was a threatening menace to all of his employees. His stance and persona projected a bullying style of management. This had to stop. I reported it. An investigation proved my allegations and he was demoted."

"I experienced horrific retaliation, hostility and had to submit to a fitness for duty exam before I was approved to return to work. Eventually, I was reassigned to two different offices and was RIF'd into another position with another department. All the while the offenders and accused remained intact in their jobs and positions."

"A supervisor was bullying, intimidating, threatening and humiliating me, in meetings with others and by phone. The individual was near retirement and was allowed to retire early."

"I was put on administrative leave (with pay) for over 6 months. I was threatened with dismissal and ultimately given a bogus geographic RIF. The result of my report turned up major finding of fraud waste and abuse related to that contract."

"It was ignored. Retaliatory behavior commenced immediately."

"Was held back by middle management and ignored by senior management."

"I was not popular with supervisor. Was not chosen for promotion and other favorite projects."

"Person in charge of this particular function was "let go" and no longer in charge of this event."

"I had responsibilities taken away. I was pressured to quit. I wasn't afforded the same opportunities, that I was qualified for, that were offered to my peers. When I did my job to the best of my abilities I was told that I was "...making other people look bad." When I asked to be considered for promotion opportunities I was told by the same supervisor that I thought that I'm 'entitled'."

"Had to go to the legislature to get relief. Also got a letter of reprimand for speaking out against the downsizing."

"I went to my supervisor in the last year reported inter-agency billing fraud. Nothing was done to my knowledge. I reported a second time. I believe it was kept in-house and not even sent to the next level, even though it the fraud was confirmed."

"No outcome. Told to document one year ago. Still documenting."

"I voiced concerns internally about our commissioner's management and experienced retribution for this. We are supposed to be able to express concerns without retribution, but the retribution is there and it's easy for a commissioner in a position of power to cover up."

"I was hassled and lost privileges I had before..."

"Management started to focus on me as a problem."

"Not much. We still don't have proper safety polices."

"I was treated as a troublemaker and everything was swept under the carpet. In my professional life I was demoted and ignored. The individual who I blew the whistle on told everyone not to associate with me. I was bullied by him, like I was at the playground in middle school."

"The employee who was misusing his internet access was terminated from state employment."

"Nothing became of it because politics rules in State Government."

"It was ignored and management cooled toward me."

"No response from superiors in our organization."

"Prefer not to say, as I was investigated because of the statement I made. I have transferred to another department and do not want any problems."

"I was initially investigated for not reporting sooner and for creating a hostile workplace. I was then cleared. Now management appears to be retaliating."

"I was not taken seriously by management. Management tended to sweep things under the rug rather than address them directly."

Quotes: If you have ever known a whistleblower, please describe the outcome of his/her whistleblowing action

"The person was forced to retire early due to retaliatory harassment."

"It was made clear the person would not get any type of promotion or raise; they would be tasked with work duties not applicable to their job and they would essentially be purposely overlooked for any possible opportunity for professional development or gain. The person left the department to work somewhere else."

"One was eventually fired because s/he came forward. The other had to look for other employment in another agency with the state due to retaliation, etc."

"Outcome was that nothing was done."

"Complaints...were met with undue pressure and eventual administrative leave, pending termination (the whistleblower has been out on leave for months now)."

"The employee was marginalized and passed up for promotion in favor of a newer employee. They ended up leaving the office as a RIF."

"Nothing. The supervisor got away with payroll fraud."

"The whistleblower was not highly regarded or well liked in the department and was eventually out on administrative leave and investigated. The whistleblower was 100% correct in the complaint."

"The whistleblower's employment was terminated by certain members of administration."

"There was no resolution because there were not enough wasted dollars for the AG's office to be interested in pursuing."

"Demotion and removal of tasks/responsibilities. Pressure to quit."

"The State of Vermont was sued for discrimination and a very large settlement was paid."

"No outcome. Told to document a year ago and still documenting."

"The person was given a better job at another location after suffering through retaliatory behavior."

"Testified to Senate and HR director and was ignored."

"Eventually let go."

"The law continued to be broken despite his efforts."

"He retired because they would not allow him to grow within company. That was their retaliation."

"It was such a traumatic event that this person offered to RIF herself just to get away from higher ups who might discriminate against her."

"He was labeled a "disgruntled employee" by the department, through the media."

"There appeared to be retaliation by management."

"A horrible series of internal investigations. The person eventually left the agency but it was a while after the investigation. Some people's lives were significantly disrupted."

"They were hounded until they quit."

"Management was told to cease and desist threatening practices."

"Management said it wouldn't correct what it can't see firsthand."

"Employee was targeted by management and ended up quitting state job."

"Continued harassment and threats."

"He no longer works for the state."

"Lost his job."

"There was a justified sense of fear of what management might do as a response."

"Hostile work place created by supervisor."