Illinois lawmakers have changed the process for investigating claims of inappropriate behavior in the legislative branch, a move that proponents say will give individuals more confidence to report inappropriate behavior. HB 138 was signed into law in June. With the statutory change, the Legislative Inspector General can conduct independent investigations into sexual harassment allegations without obtaining consent from the Legislative Ethics Commission — a bipartisan group of Illinois representatives and senators.

Lawmakers established the Office of the Legislative Inspector General 15 years ago, and this year’s changes seek to provide it with greater independence while also improving transparency regarding ethics complaints.

Under HB 138, an independent committee of judges and/or former prosecutors will conduct searches for a new legislative inspector general when a vacancy arises (the legislature retains the authority of appointment). The new law, too, ensures that the position of legislative inspector general is filled in a timely manner, or that his or her investigative duties will be handled by the state’s auditor general. Illinois’ law also authorizes the inspector general to share information about the investigative process with complainants.