

My name is Emily May, and I am the executive director of Hollaback!, an organization that has been working to end street harassment since 2005. I want to thank Councilmember Julissa Ferreras and the entire Committee on Women's Issues for coordinating this hearing. While street harassment has probably existed in our city since the advent of streets, this is the first ever hearing to specifically address this pervasive issue. It's a historic occasion, thank you.

Hollaback! is an international movement to end street harassment that started right here in New York City. It began because myself and a few friends were getting street harassed three or four times daily. When we walked on, we felt weak. When we yelled at the guys, the situation escalated, and the police didn't care. The most common suggestion for dealing with it was to plug our heads with earphones and pretend it wasn't happening. But something inside us told us this wasn't enough—we wanted to share our stories, and to get our fellow New Yorker's to share theirs. Five years later, over 1000 bold women and LGBTQ New Yorkers have told their stories of street harassment. Their stories have inspired Hollaback!s to launch in an additional 20 cities worldwide including London, Israel, Berlin, and Buenos Aires. Within the next couple of weeks we will launch an iPhone and a Droid app, making it even easier to Hollaback! and giving the public the real-time data on this pervasive problem.

At Hollaback!, we've heard stories of women leaving their jobs, or breaking their lease, because their commute involved too much street harassment. We've heard stories from girls skipping school to avoid harassment. And we've heard a surprising number of stories from women who moved out of New York City because they just couldn't take it anymore. These stories come from women and girls in all five boroughs, and represent every ethnicity, from the ages of 10 to 75.

Too commonly, street harassment is believed to be the "price women pay" for living in New York City. But we're not buying it. Taxes are the price we pay for living in this city, not street harassment.

Just this week I had the opportunity to speak with young women at Barnard and the Little Red School House. Of these 150 young women, 100% of them had experienced street harassment according to our anonymous survey tool. As frustrated as each of them was about street harassment, they were inspired to hear that the New York City Council was listening. Many of them are submitting testimony today.

We have heard from New York City's women and girls. We know this is a problem. But who we haven't heard from is our legislators. Until now.

We have an historic opportunity to do something about this. Street harassment is poised to be the next big women's issue of this decade, in the same way that workplace harassment was in the 1980s. It is a gateway crime, creating a culture in our city that makes other forms of violence against women OK. And the New York City council is well placed to lead the charge, just like they have with so many battles that have come before it.

I know what you're thinking – that this issue is going to be tough to legislate. We could choose to ignore it—after all, this is what we have done for a very long time. But I propose an

alternative—we could choose to work together and take action—and for it to work, we need to move quickly.

Our ten-year plan is to build a world where all the baby girls in strollers today will never have to experience street harassment the way that girls today have. Today, on this most historic occasion, I'd like to invite you to join us.

Here are three initial first steps:

1. We need a citywide study on the impact of street harassment on women and girls, including recommendations for next steps;
2. We need a citywide public information campaign that teaches women, girls, men, and boys that street harassment is not OK; and
3. We need to establish harassment-free zones around our schools, similar to the drug-free zones that exist today.

New York City's women and girls deserve the freedom to walk down the streets of New York safely and confidently, without being the object of some creep's fantasy. And you have the power to change that. You have the power to rewrite history for New York City's tiniest.

So let's do it. Let's make today the day that New York City boldly decided to end street harassment. The women and girls of New York City are counting on us.