

Testimony:  
The State  
of Our  
Streets

November 7

2013

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Pre-submissions of live testimony for the November 7, 2013 Philadelphia City Council hearing on street harassment in Philadelphia. Addendum includes written testimony from community members who cannot be present.

**Street  
harassment in  
Philadelphia**



## **NUALA CABRAL – FAAN Mail**

My name is Nuala Cabral and I am 32 year old educator who works at Temple University. I have lived in West Philadelphia for 5 years after moving to Philly to attend graduate school. I have been volunteering with HollaBackPHILLY around community engagement and educational workshops for three years.

Before I begin with my personal testimony on this issue, I would like to get a pulse of the room on this issue. Please raise your hand if you have experienced any of the following interactions: How many of you have been followed by a stranger on the street? How many of you have been cat called or shouted at by a stranger? How many of you have been complimented by a stranger about your body or appearance, but in a way that made you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed? How many of you have been touched or grabbed by a stranger? These are all forms of street harassment.

Throughout my 20's I lived in several cities and saw that street harassment was present everywhere. I realized that navigating street harassment is like an art. Growing up I would ignore catcalls and other forms of harassment, but later found myself in spaces where ignoring these behaviors could lead to aggressive behavior and violence, for example, getting a bottle thrown at your head. Although street harassment is not unique to Philly, out of the five cities I have lived in on the East Coast, I have encountered some of the most aggressive and persistent street harassment here in Philadelphia.

There have been days that I have encountered or witnessed street harassment several times during my commute to and from work. This is especially scary at night. I remember one evening in particular last year that was exceptionally disturbing. After experiencing relentless flattery on the El Train, I left the 46th train station where a young woman walking in front of me was being questioned and harassed. "What is your name?" the man kept asking her. Finally she just responded, "No" and abruptly crossed the street. As she crossed the street and walked toward her destination, towards a darker and more desolate area, the man who was questioning her backed off and got into his car. I continued walking and had about five more blocks ahead of me. Two blocks later, I noticed a man loitering alone in the shadows by a stop sign. Following my instincts, I began to walk in the street where the streetlights were a bit brighter. As I passed by this man, I wondered if he knew I felt isolated and uncomfortable, but I kept walking with a purpose. My parents always taught me to stay alert and look confident. When I reached home I was relieved for myself, but wondered about the young woman I crossed paths with 10 minutes earlier. Did she get home okay?

I began to play back the evening in my mind, the incessant compliments and questions on the train, the aggressive harassment near the train station, the fear I felt passing those empty lots where a man stood in the shadows. The sequence of interactions left me feeling deflated, tears streamed down my face. For a moment I considered moving back home to Providence, RI, where I didn't have to rely on taking public transportation alone at night, where street harassment was less aggressive and constant.

It should not be a routine experience, but for women, girls, LGBT folks and non-gender conforming people, gender based street harassment is a daily experience. I am here today to urge our city officials to take this issue seriously and respond to this problem proactively. Please support HollaBack Philly's



city-wide safety audit project so that we can gather data that will inform policies and action to make our public spaces safer. Additionally, I am here to urge city officials to support public awareness campaigns, such as HollaBack’s PSA ads that ran on SEPTA this past spring. We need more educational efforts like these to raise awareness and provoke meaningful public discourse around this issue.

I love so many things about the city of Philadelphia and I know that we can do better to make public spaces safer for women, girls and the LGBT community. Let us begin this work together, now.



## **JORDAN GWENDOLYN DAVIS**

Good morning, my name is Jordan Gwendolyn Davis, and in the 2 1/2 years I have lived in Philadelphia, I have experienced pervasive street harassment, not just as a woman, but as a transgender, disabled, lesbian, and low income woman. I have been whistled at, propositioned, called such ugly terms as “ho”, “ratchet”, “bulldyke”, “fat white retarded faggot”, “Jer-RY, Jer-RY”, “you take it in the ass”, “dude look like a lady”, had questions asked about my sexuality and gender, had my rear slapped by men, and had violence threatened against me.

But perhaps one of the worst instances of harassment came this June at Suburban Station. I was waiting for a train when a older man started stalking me, and the next thing I knew, in midday, on the platform, the guy rubbed his genitals against my buttocks. I have survived sexual assault before, and that and other disabilities caused me to panic. I ran onto my train and the guy continued to follow me. I screamed for him to go away, but he didn’t listen, and the other passengers seemed to blame me.

People ask me to go to the police. However, the police, especially SEPTA police, have been known to lack sensitivity towards transgender as well as disabled people. I feared, based on previous interactions, that they would pathologize, politicize, and even accuse me of being a sex worker. I dream of a day that all people of all races, religions, colors, genders, abilities, classes, gender identities, and sexual orientations can be safe in this city, but we are a long way from that. Thank you for accepting this testimony, and I hope to see a difference be made.



## **DOMONIQUE WILLIAMS**

I want to feel safe when I leave my house to go anywhere. There were two different incidents that each man on his bike tried to follow me. The first incident happened a few winters back. I was walking down heading to 16<sup>th</sup> and Locust Street to meet with a friend. I'm minding my business and suddenly I saw this one guy that looks at me while riding by. Next he rode near me asking a round of twenty questions. A few I remember was 'how old are you', 'what's your name', and 'can I have your number'. I kept replying with 'I don't give that information out'. My tone and body language screamed 'not interested' yet he kept on following me for a good part of the block before Locust Street. I was annoyed yet nervous. I said to myself 'Gods if he don't leave me the hell alone, I'm going to push him in the street'. This guy's phone rang and after a few minutes, he turned around and left. I was so relieved that I wanted to hug someone.

The second incident happened this past summer during the daytime. My mom asked me to run up the street to the store. When I went out the front door and the parking lot gate of my apartment, an older guy saw me and rode onto the sidewalk next to me. I didn't know that until he said hi which caught me off guard. I said hi back to be polite while not looking at him. He asked me my name and what I was doing. I gave him a fake name and said an errand. I noticed every time I took a step, he kept up with me. I stopped almost near the door of the second apartment building, and looked at him. He said he was wondering if we should get to know each other. I said no while looking very hard, without emotion, at him. After a few seconds he said 'see you around' and rode off. I was angry more than scared. I told my mom what happened, and she gave me a look that said 'so'.

These may seem to be nothing. But when I put them into perspective, my safety could have been jeopardized. That's the main lesson people need to be educated more about street harassment. I, as a woman of color, could have been harmed. Harmed because I as a female have no rights to say no to any male nor tell them to step off. These two guys could choice to follow me to my destination(s), and try to keep me separated from other people. I could have been hit, held by weapon point, called a lot of insults, and so forth. A simple 'no' would have pissed certain guys off thus they could have used any type of these harassments, verbal and/or physical, on me. It's a concern that I have to worry about my safety every time I take a step out of my home. It became a point that I need to buy and carry a pocket knife with me at all times since street harassment can appear at anytime.



## **KATIE MONROE: WOMEN BIKE PHL**

My name is Katie Monroe. I run a program at the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia called Women Bike PHL, with the goal of getting more women riding bikes in our city. Harassment comes up constantly in my work. I'm a firm believer that active transportation -- biking and walking -- is something we should all do more of. It's the most efficient and useful way to incorporate physical activity into our daily lives, it keeps us connected us with our communities, it's environmentally friendly.... But the streets and sidewalks where Philadelphians can bike and walk are not equally welcoming to all.

A few Thursdays ago, my bike had a flat tire. Normally I ride to work, but I had to walk instead. I remember thinking when I left my house -- maybe I shouldn't have worn this skirt, these boots. Maybe I should have dressed down. I hate that I have to think that way, it feels like I'm blaming myself for something that's not my fault. Sure enough, during my commute several men I passed on the sidewalk looked me up and down, disgustingly obviously, and one muttered a comment about my body as we passed on the sidewalk. I ignored him, too scared to tell him off without any bystanders around, and ended up feeling frustrated that he "got away with it."

When I'm riding, I feel safer from this kind of harassment. Men don't have the chance to say things under their breath to me that I'll actually hear when I'm pedaling down the street, and if they do decide to yell something at me, I feel much less vulnerable knowing I can just bike away. Sometimes I even feel safe enough to yell back at them, which I never do when I'm on foot. Fast forward to the end of the day -- my flat tire was fixed and I was riding home, down 15th street at around 9pm. I was relieved to be back on my bike instead of walking, especially at night. That man who passed me on my morning commute was still lingering in my head after a 12 hour workday. Suddenly, some guy in an SUV pulls up alongside me and starts yelling at me to "get in the bike lane" (which is actually just a shared-use lane on 15th street -- I was legally allowed to be in the lane where I was riding). I was so exhausted and overwhelmed and frightened that I can't even remember what I said back. I know it wasn't aggressive though -- I know better than to pick a fight in that situation, because the bicyclist will always lose in a standoff with an SUV. He continued to yell at me, threatening to run me off the road, so eventually I just got off the road and walked my bike on the sidewalk instead. He screamed at me, calling me a rude combination of the f word and the c word, before speeding off. And then I cried the rest of my walk home, too freaked out to get back on my bike despite not wanting to be walking alone at night either.

What's the moral of this story? As a woman who bikes and walks around this city for transportation, I experience some form of harassment -- whether it's because of my gender or my bicycle or both -- nearly every day. On some days, and this particular Thursday was one of them, it feels like there's no escape -- on the streets or the sidewalk, I will be made to feel unsafe, objectified, scared, disgusting, small. Just because I have a female body and I choose to leave my house.

I asked some of the women bicyclists I know to share their harassment stories. One woman was biking over the South Street bridge and had a car full of white college-age men pull an illegal u-turn to follow her, calling out comments about wanting to have sex with her and ultimately chasing her in their car for blocks until she managed to bike the wrong way down a one-way street to get away from them. Many women reported hearing the comments "can I get a ride" and "I wish I were that bike seat" from men when they're biking (I know I have!). One woman said groups of men often call out "Can I



get a ride, baby” even when she is toting her *children* on her bicycle with her. One woman said she seems to get harassed more than her male friends, and wondered if it was because she wasn’t riding fast enough. Another woman recently heard a “huge smooching sound” come from a cab at 3rd and Dickinson when she was riding, but ultimately said that biking is a “huge resource for her” to feel safer from harassment around the city, compared to other forms of transportation. Several women admitted to sometimes feeling compelled to ride on the sidewalk, or more often, run red lights, despite knowing that it is illegal, to escape unwanted interactions when they’re stopped on their bikes.

We need more active transportation for everyone in Philadelphia -- but it’s hard to convince women to bike and walk more when our streets and sidewalks can feel so threatening.

**Attachment/addendum with complete list of stories I received: (for minutes, but will not be read at hearing)**

Emma Yamamoto: I was biking from West Philadelphia to Center City last spring to have supper with a friend. While I was crossing the South Street Bridge, a car full of college age White men saw me. I assume they were frat guys at Penn, but I didn’t ask them. They were going the opposite direction, saw me and pulled an illegal u-turn on the South Street Bridge. They pulled up next to me at the red light and began to say really terrible things: how they wanted to have sex with me, etc. etc. I did not engage. I have found that usually men will get bored if you don’t talk back. The light turned green and the car full of men followed me. They continued to yell at me. I ran a red light to get away from them and they ran the red light as well. They were chasing me. I pulled some incredibly dangerous and illegal turns to weave through traffic so that I could lose them, which I did, thank goodness.

Kate Kern Mundie I did not think this type of thing was really affecting me anymore. (I used to get it a lot when I was in my 20s) But I have had some really aggressive interactions lately with men calling me the c and b words. It seems that my guy friends don’t get the same treatment on the road that I do. I kept thinking it was that I don’t ride well enough/fast enough.

Michelle Lee Bikes & bike lanes are actually a huge resource for me in terms of feeling comfortable and avoiding street harassment around the city ... A few instances of mild harassment (including a huge smooching sound from a cab yesterday at 3rd & Dickinson) that are annoying but don’t seem dangerous enough to change my travel.

I’m more concerned about physical safety. After the shooting near 8th & Moore last month, I’ve been wary about riding through that area in the dark, especially if in business clothes/heels. A couple weeks ago I had to ride to 30th Street Station before dawn and asked my husband to come with me. It was the right choice at the time but felt totally disempowering.

Godis Shani Asantewaa Strothers Sometimes I ride too slowly to ride in the bike lane so I ride ON THE SIDEWALK, on underutilized small streets, etc. to avoid any sort of harassment from vehicles coming up behind me. I avoid fast roads where drivers can get away with crap by being anonymous & quick.

Lisa Jan Wielunski 99.9% of the time I relish the smiles and interactions that happen when I’m riding down the street. But stop lights can be wearying places. I don’t like rolling through a red, but sometimes people take this as an opportunity to start a conversation about my love life, or how dangerous it is for me to be

riding through the city at night. ...If only some folks realized that the only people who make me feel unsafe are those who try to inflict their own fears on me, or who make assumptions about my soul.



Erin McLeary I get a fair amount of "friendly" harassment while on my bike--comments on my body, "is that bicycle built for 2" sort of stuff. Always when stopped at traffic lights..... the number one reason I will jump a light is to end an unwanted interaction. I wish that in discussions about traffic law enforcement there was more sensitivity to why women in particular will choose to "run" a light/stop sign.

Jeannette Brugger Most comments are \*meant\* to be friendly but are still obnoxious, like "take me home with you" or "damn, you make biking look good." I can usually come up with something snide to say with a smile. Only a few times in 10 years have I been yelled at as a stupid b\*tch and told if I didn't move over, they'd run me over, usually by people speeding down Bainbridge or Kelly Dr at the 25th St intersection.

Marni Duffy

Closer to sexual harassment is the line I get, often with all three of my kids on board, "Can I get a ride?", sometimes, "Can I get a ride, baby?" ... always from men, 95% of the time from groups of 2 or more men, usually men sitting on stoops in the middle of the day. Thankfully, the neighborhood where that happens is not on my daily route any more.

Myra Clemens

On two different occasions I had young female drivers try to run me off the road. One woman actually swerved and hit me with her mirror. Then yelled at me "Bitch get out of the street!"

Megan Rosenbach I won't recount all of the harassment I have received while riding a bicycle in this city (some of it sexual harassment and some biking harassment), but here is the most offensive one: I was riding down Spring Garden and at a stop light a man rolled down his window and said, "I wish I were that bike seat". (gross!). Thankfully it was day time on a busy street, but if it were night time on a neighborhood street I may have panicked.

Kathy Hurchla: I have heard both "can I get a ride" and "wish I were that seat" - sad how common these phrases are.

Karina Puttieva: Before I got injured and had to start taking the bus to work every day, I use to walk everywhere. As much as I hate the bus because it is a cesspool of smells, germs, and airborne diseases, I noticed that I am much less wary these mornings. As a pedestrian, I would get harassed and cat called on the street at least 3 days out of the 5 day work week. One time I got cat called 3 times by 3 different men during the first 3 blocks I walked from work towards my house. That's about a 6 minute span. It was the trifecta on a bad day. At the last catcall I actually walked up to the guy in his truck and yelled "You're harassing me!" in his face. He only smiled, which made me so angry I started to cry. Recently, a man on a motorbike made kissing noises at me while I was at the bus stop and he was at a red light. I was alone, but I managed to look him square in the face, and loudly and seriously told him to "Stop doing that. That's harassment." He didn't say anything but he did turn to look forward instead of continuing to look at me. It was a small victory but an important one. I had him trapped just as he had trapped me and made him rethink his gaze.





## KARENINA WOLFF

It was recently said that Philadelphia is the 4th bike-friendliest cities in the country, and I believe it. With all of the bike lanes, flat topography and drivers who are learning how to share the road with us, I love biking in Philly. More than anything, I feel amazing when I'm on my bike. I love feeling connected to my community and the speed with which I can get from place to place. As with any moving vehicle, I need to take care when I'm operating my bike. There's a lot to pay attention to, between the cars next me, the pedestrians waiting to cross in front of me, and the potholes, stop signs and stop lights that are a normal part of biking in the city. All of that focus can be dangerously intercepted, however, when someone calls out to me. "Hey girl on the bike!", a man walking down on the street might yell when I'm riding past. Having someone call out to me when I'm on my bike is equivalent to having someone honk their horn. I think that there must be something wrong, like my jacket is about to get caught in my chain or I'm in danger of a serious accident. I look up from the road, panicked, thinking "Who said that? What are they saying? What's wrong? Am I in danger?". Looking for the person who said that, I almost veer into a parked car. Then the man continues, "Can I ride wit you?". "What?!", I think, "That's all he had to say? I almost veered into a parked car, made a bunch of drivers swerve to get around me, and that's all he had to say?" With anger and dismay I realize that he wasn't trying to help me or warn me about an unsafe situation. He was just doing something for his own gratification. I ride home, distracted by the sadness I'm feeling that someone would have such utter disregard for my own safety and well-being. I just wanted to ride my bike, and I just wanted to do so safely. Please let me do that so we can truly say that Philadelphia is one of the safest cities in America. Thank you.



## AVALON CLARE

Last week two men in a black SUV stopped to leer at me while I walked my dog on 12th street near Tasker, only a couple blocks from my house. I asked them to please keep driving and the driver said, "We're just admiring you." I then flipped them off and continued to do so until they drove away. They were stopped for so long that the car behind them was honking. As they sped off the man in the passenger seat yelled, "You aren't even that sexy, bitch." This was the first time I had left the house that day. I can get pretty anxious about leaving the house anyway, but after my interaction with those men I felt nauseated, unsafe, and really un-sexy. Later that same day I decided to ride my bike to do some errands. While I was riding home in South Philly a man leaned out of his truck window to say, "I almost wish I was your bike seat." At this point I was very angry, so I screamed at him from my bike for as long as we were next to each other, which was several blocks. Still, a feeling of powerlessness crept over me that was unshakeable. When these harassments occur, I feel endangered and disrespected. I feel frustrated that even if I had taken a photo of his license plate, who could I have shown it to? What repercussions would there have been? Probably none. I hate street harassment because it has the power to ruin my day. It can turn an empowering bike ride through my own neighborhood into a frightening ordeal that leaves me feeling exposed and vulnerable. Men need to be held accountable for the ways they intimidate and emotionally disturb women walking and riding our bikes in Philadelphia. We have a right to do so without being subjected to sexual harassment.



## SARAH MM

As a woman in the City of Philadelphia, it's extremely difficult to get from point A to point B without being scared for your life at any point in a day. You step out of your house first thing in the morning to go to the coffee shop and hear "daymn girl" or "smile honey". You get off the subway by work and have to stop before climbing stairs because a pair of young strangers have made it obvious that they'd like to follow closely behind you to get a glimpse up your skirt. You walk home from dinner and have to be on guard (since it is now dark and the harassment only increases after sundown) only to be taunted by a man on a bike who passes you twice, slows down behind you and to say "where you goin baby, how bout some fun". When you say "no" he pretends not to understand and rides closer declaring his overpowering size over you without having to say anything. You ask, "please leave me alone" and he still is confused. Now you have a choice, you can scream at the top of your lungs for him to GO AWAY, or you can just hope to god that he will give up and let you walk home without raping you. You yell, because you're scared, even though no one is around, and luckily he goes away (though this is obviously not the case for everyone).

The next day you are walking to a friends house mid day in south philly only to be asked "do you want to make some money" from the 3 men twice your size on the corner of 7th & Morris. When you do decide to stand up for yourself, and shout back "don't talk to women like that" or "do you really think that works?" or any number of things, you are laughed at because you are ultimately powerless against the harassers who have total control over you outside your home.

These assailants in South Philly specifically have followed, screamed, cornered, and threatened me to the point where i am forced to face life and death decisions on a weekly basis. It makes me want to not leave the house. It makes me miss out on events. It makes me terrified for my friends. Most importantly, if I can't go out without being harassed, what is the point in going out at all? There isn't one. Women across Philadelphia have to fight this quiet battle every single day. Some do it better than others, but we all have to. It's not fair. We shouldn't have to be terrorized every second we step out our door. We shouldn't have to be aware of what neighborhoods our friends live in and how early we have to leave to get home safely. Yes, crime happens everywhere at any given time but harassment is also a crime that goes unpunished until it turns into something like rape or assault and even then very little is done to bring the criminals to justice. I have called the police to report my harassers and they do nothing. I have yelled back like a crazy person, ran away in tears, and now have to pick and choose what neighborhoods i travel to in the city of Philadelphia depending on the amount of times i have been harassed and severity of the cases. There is no reason why there cant be some repercussions for harassers or some kind of system for catching assailants who think it's ok to objectify people.



## **HOLLY KEARL – Stop Street Harassment**

What could be more basic than the right to walk down the street, without facing harassment? Because of gender-based street harassment, this is a right that girls and women and some men, especially in the LGBTQ community, are routinely denied, including in Philadelphia. My name is Holly Kearl and street harassment is my area of expertise. It's what I wrote my master's thesis on at George Washington University in 2007 and it's the topic of two books I authored. Currently, I am a consultant to the United Nations' Global Safe Cities Initiative and I run the nonprofit Stop Street Harassment. Among our programs is International Anti-Street Harassment Week, which Philadelphia community members participate in each year.

Street harassment is both a local problem, as Hollaback! Philly's survey shows, and it's a global problem. Recent studies conducted in places like Egypt, Yemen, Peru, India, France, Canada, and a few American cities show that most – if not all – women have experienced it, including sexually explicit comments, following, flashing, and groping. This is not okay. What is very alarming is the young age at which street harassment begins. In an online study I conducted, nearly 90 percent of 811 women said street harassment began by age 19 and almost one in four said it started by age 12. Many women recall it happening as they traveled to and from school.

Gender-based street harassment also impacts men in the LGBTQ community and some straight men who may look less “masculine” (such as having long hair). Transgender individuals face the most frequent and violent types of harassment, by citizens and sometimes by police officers. All people who experience street harassment tend to feel less safe and comfortable in public spaces, especially while alone. They may keep their head down, walk fast, wear sunglasses and ear phones and try to look invisible. They may change routes and routines, give up hobbies, and stop going to the most convenient bus stop or store to try to avoid harassment. In my study, I even heard from people who moved neighborhoods or changed jobs. Street harassment is a human rights violation because it keeps harassed persons from having equal access to public spaces and the educational, economic, and leadership opportunities there. For this reason, in March, the United Nations tasked countries with addressing this problem...and it's time for cities in the USA to follow this directive, too, including Philadelphia. What can we do to stop street harassment in Philadelphia? Here are three suggestions.

1. Conduct community safety audits around the city to empower citizens to evaluate their neighborhoods and make concrete recommendations to address problem areas. This is a strategy the UN uses all over the world. In the U.S., I helped lead audits in Washington, D.C., and the NYC Council has co-led ones in their city.
2. Age-appropriate sexual harassment information for students at every school, just as there are anti-drug and disaster preparedness initiatives. Sexual harassment is more relevant to their daily challenges both in and outside of school. They should know what it constitutes and how to deal with it.
3. Addressing harassment on public transportation. Transit authorities in Boston, Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C. have funded anti-harassment PSA campaigns. In April, Hollaback!



Philly sponsored really powerful anti-harassment ads on SEPTA and I would like to see the Philadelphia transit system fund it going forward.

Everyone deserves equal access to public spaces. It's time for the Philadelphia City Council to work with community members to achieve that goal. Thank you.



## **ANNA KEGLER - HollabackPHILLY**

My name is Anna Kegler, and I am the Deputy Director of HollabackPHILLY. I want to thank Councilman Kenny and all of the city council members for attending this hearing today, and for your recognition that street harassment is a serious issue worthy of serious attention.

This issue is regularly minimized and brushed aside. People ask, “well, isn’t it a compliment?” or say “it’s not that big of a deal - you just need to grow a thicker skin. Aren’t there more serious things you should be worrying about?”

Here are some recent examples that were submitted to HollabackPHILLY’s blog: a woman whose cab driver locked the doors when the cab arrived at her destination at 2nd and Tasker Street. The driver, giggling, refused to listen to her demands that he open the door and insisted that he would not unlock them until she repeated after him “open the door baby please”. Another recent report was from a woman who, while riding her bike towards Fishtown on Susquehanna, had a male bike rider ride up next to her and grope her while saying “you like it.” She screamed at him, but it was not until she nearly fell off her bike that he left her alone. Another recent submission came from a woman who reported that she had been waiting on the subway platform when a man said “hello” to her. She said “hi” back, and looked away. He said, “I like your hair” and when she looked up, she saw that he had unzipped his pants and was masturbating in front of her. Lastly, over the summer in West Philly, a man who seemed totally nonthreatening because he was on the phone, about to pass me walking in my direction, instead interrupted his conversation saying “just a minute, I’ll call you back” so that he could turn around and follow me down the street asking me what my name was and why wouldn’t I talk to him.

Street harassment denies women and LGBT folks their right to be in public spaces while feeling safe and comfortable. When we are harassed while walking, on our bikes, and on public transportation, we receive the message that we do not control these spaces. That we do not belong in these spaces. Street harassment shows us that we are passing through someone else’s space, someone who has the unchallenged right to stare at us, evaluate and comment on our bodies, demand that we respond to their attention, and threaten us if we don’t. Street harassment shows us that wherever we’re going, whatever we’re thinking about, whatever our agenda for the day is, is unimportant. It’s unimportant enough that we can be interrupted at any time by “hey, what’s up? I’m talking to you. What, are you too stuck up to say hi?” or “you’d look so beautiful if you smiled.”

Everyone in our community deserves the right to feel safe, comfortable, and respected in public spaces, which is why the city of Philadelphia’s support for community safety audits is critical. It’s time to stop minimizing street harassment and instead start treating it like the solvable problem that it is.

Thank you.



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY FROM PEOPLE WHO CANNOT BE PRESENT:**

Timaree Schmit, Ph.D.  
*Sexuality Educator and Podcaster*

As a cyclist and as a pedestrian, I experience sexual harassment and unwanted commentary on my body on a daily basis. Regardless of the time of year or what I'm wearing, men who are complete strangers feel comfortable telling me what they would like to do to me and pressuring me to talk to them and give them my number. In addition to be annoying most of the time, it can be be intimidating and threatening at times.

There's the night 2 guys in a car drove next to me on Morris and yelled weird things out the window. I tried slowing way down so they'd pass- they slowed down too. I tried going way faster- they sped up. As I tried to get away, they started actively chasing me, taking the same turns I did. I had to illegally turn the wrong way on Passyunk and ride on the sidewalk to ditch them, but I saw they continued to circle looking for me.

There's the afternoon I was biking down Broad to work and a guy in a giant truck immediately behind me started honking. Then he pulled up next to me and hollered out the window that I was beautiful. I told him to leave me alone. He continued the chatter out the window about my looks, effectively pinning me in a tiny space between his vehicle and the parked cars, which was incredibly scary. He suddenly pulled ahead and went faster, only to come to a dramatic stop at the next light where he turned and angled his car so I couldn't easily pass. More yelling out the window on how I should pull over and talk to him and I had to go up the sidewalk to ditch him too.