



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.