

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

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October 28, 2010  
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HELD AT: Committee Room  
250 Broadway, 14th Floor

B E F O R E:  
JULISSA FERRERAS  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Julissa Ferreras  
Charles Barron  
Elizabeth S. Crowley  
Margaret S. Chin  
Jumaane D. Williams

## A P P E A R A N C E S

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Author

Tracy Hobson  
Executive Director  
Center for Anti-Violence Education

Harriet Lessel  
Executive Director  
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CONNECT

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Becky Weinheimer  
Mother of Holly Kearl

Natalia Aristizabal  
Make the Road New York

Mandy Van Deven  
Deputy Director  
RightRides for Women's Safety

Zehra Ali  
On behalf of  
Sonia Ossorio  
Executive director  
National Organization for Women

Alison Roh Park  
Media Relations  
Center for Constitutional Rights

Brian Bradley  
Performer  
"The Astronomical Kid"

Grace Tobin  
Student  
Elisabeth Irwin High School

Leah Todd  
Coordinator  
SafeWalk

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Good

afternoon. I'd like to thank everyone for coming today. My name is Julissa Ferreras and I am the Chair of the Women's Issues Committee.

Today's hearing will discuss the subject of street harassment of women and girls in New York City. On a recent visit to a high school in my district, I was told by a group of bright female students of their daily experience of verbal harassment by local workmen while entering and leaving school. I was outraged.

We have all seen or experienced street harassment and we have all probably given up the idea that we could stop it. After all, some would say, how can we regulate public speech, even if it's vulgar, offensive or subtly threatening? Nevertheless, the notion of yet more girls having to contend with this behavior, especially near their schools, made me determined to address this issue. I was further encouraged by an op-ed by Elizabeth Mendez Berry in *El Diario* on this subject.

Street harassment is sexual harassment that takes place in public spaces. The

1  
2 behaviors involved can include catcalling,  
3 whistling, horn honking, suggestive and sexual  
4 comments and even unwanted groping or touching.  
5 The perpetrators are generally male and the  
6 victims are generally female. The behavior is  
7 unsolicited and unwanted.

8 This harassment limits the rights  
9 and freedoms of women and girls to enjoy a simple  
10 walk around. It conditions their every move and  
11 forces them to adopt a veil of caution as they  
12 walk in public. The environment that allows for  
13 this type of behavior has roots in the same  
14 attitudes that say it's okay to treat women as  
15 second class citizens, as property or as nothing  
16 more than sexual objects. It has roots in the  
17 same belief system that allows for women to be  
18 battered, abused and even sometimes raped. This  
19 is simply unacceptable.

20 I am extremely concerned at recent  
21 reports that Latina teens attempt suicide twice as  
22 often as their white or black counterparts. Young  
23 Latinas in particular are suffering intense social  
24 pressures and dislocation. I suspect that deep  
25 cultural attitudes about women may be a cause of

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2 these elevated rates of suicide attempts.  
3 Empowerment of women and girls, education of men  
4 and boys, and the exploration of possible legal  
5 remedies are all necessary to get at the root of  
6 this issue. However, societal attitudes will  
7 continue to be changed without first acknowledging  
8 that there is, in fact, a problem.

9 I hope that today's hearing will  
10 begin a dialogue, at least in New York City,  
11 towards such changes. Thank you.

12 I'd like to acknowledge Council  
13 Member Charles Barron from Brooklyn, who is here.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you  
15 very much. To the chair of this committee, we  
16 couldn't be taking a more timely issue on. I  
17 think young men in our communities, we need  
18 manhood training. They need to understand how to  
19 respect women and what women like and what women  
20 do not like. You cannot continue to harass women  
21 and think that that's something that they're  
22 enjoying.

23 I mean, a lot of men do that, they  
24 don't even really want to have a conversation.  
25 They just harass. They say it, knowing that the

1  
2 woman is going to keep walking. If the woman  
3 stopped and said, "Are you talking to me," they  
4 probably wouldn't know what to say, because it's  
5 really not about meeting anybody. That kind of  
6 disrespect we have to stamp out in our  
7 neighborhoods.

8 Not just through manhood training  
9 and letting men know what it is to be a real man  
10 and understanding their role and the relationship  
11 they should have with women. They wouldn't want  
12 anybody to talk to their mother like that or talk  
13 to their sisters like that. Then they shouldn't  
14 talk to any other woman in the street like that.

15 In addition, I hope it doesn't have  
16 to get to this, but if it has to get to some kind  
17 of remedy through punishment or consequences for  
18 it, then so be it. People need to understand that  
19 we must respect women in our society. Just as men  
20 expect that kind of respect back to men, the same  
21 should be accorded to women.

22 So I want to thank you for bringing  
23 this to the City Council's attention. I'm going  
24 to support you 1000 percent because it's sickening  
25 to have any one of our mothers or wives or

1  
2 sisters, and now even little girls, you know 14-  
3 year-olds, 13-year-olds. They can't even walk  
4 through neighborhoods without that kind of  
5 harassment. It should be unacceptable.

6 I'm going to run up to my meeting  
7 with Consumer Affairs and I'll be right back down  
8 shortly. Just to get that started because they're  
9 going to take a vote real quick. Thank you very  
10 much.

11 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: For some  
12 opening statements, Council Member Chin.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you,  
14 Madame Chair. Thank you for having this meeting  
15 today and thank all of you for coming. It's  
16 really unacceptable behavior for any one of us  
17 females when we walk down the street that we  
18 cannot walk down safely. When I hear that it's  
19 happening to really young girls in our  
20 neighborhoods, that is really unacceptable. We  
21 really want to bring awareness to this issue. We  
22 want women to be treated with respect. We want to  
23 make sure that we start educating our community  
24 where there is young people to start respecting  
25 each other. So thank you for having the hearing

1  
2 today. I look forward to listening to your  
3 testimonies.

4 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you,  
5 Council Member Chin. There will be Council  
6 Members coming in and out, as we have parallel  
7 hearings for many of us. Please do not think that  
8 the attendance reflects the importance. Many  
9 members are going to be coming in and out  
10 throughout the next couple of hours.

11 I'd like to call up the first  
12 panel: Holly Kearl, Harriet Lessel from New York  
13 City Alliance Against Sexual Assault and Tracy  
14 Hobson from the Center for Anti-Violence  
15 Education.

16 [Pause]

17 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: This is a  
18 pretty full hearing. If you have a seat next to  
19 you, if you could just let somebody know, because  
20 I know there are some people in the hallway that  
21 would like to come in.

22 [Pause]

23 HOLLY KEARL: I'm extremely glad  
24 that the New York City Council's Committee on  
25 Women's Issues called today's hearing on street

1 harassment. Policy makers, activists, and members  
2 of the public in Argentina, Egypt, India, and  
3 Mauritius are currently collaborating on  
4 initiatives to combat street harassment, and it is  
5 heartening to see a city in the United States  
6 starting to do the same.  
7

8 Street harassment has been a  
9 research focus of mine for four years. I wrote my  
10 master's thesis at George Washington University on  
11 the topic and recently authored the book *Stop  
12 Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and  
13 Welcoming for Women*. I also run the blog Stop  
14 Street Harassment and post stories from women  
15 around the world. In the last four weeks alone,  
16 I've received 20 stories from women in eight  
17 states and seven countries. Three of the women  
18 have been from the New York City area.

19 Street harassment is a global  
20 problem, particularly in crowded cities like New  
21 York City. Recent academic and government studies  
22 showed that 80 to 100 percent of women surveyed in  
23 Indianapolis, the California Bay Area, Yemen,  
24 India, Egypt and Canada experienced street  
25 harassment. No formal studies exist that track

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street harassment rates in New York City, yet.

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As part of my book research, I informally surveyed more than 800 women from 23 countries and 45 U.S. states. Two hundred were from New York City. Ninety-nine percent of the 800 women experienced street harassment. The most shocking findings were that men had made sexually explicit comments to more than 80 percent of the women, followed three-fourths of the women, sexually touched or groped more than one-half of the women, and assaulted one-fourth of the women.

What I know is especially alarming to many of us here and why we feel so strongly about creating change is the young age at which street harassment begins. In my study, nearly 90 percent of the women said it started by the time they were 19 and almost one in four by the age of 12. Many women recall it beginning around puberty. Women in their teens and twenties tend to experience it at the most frequent rate.

Studies, articles, and girls' stories from all over the world show that girls and young women traveling to and from school are particularly vulnerable to street harassment. Not

1  
2 just on the bus or subway or as they're walking,  
3 but also at bus stops, on subway platforms, and at  
4 neighborhood carpool pickup spots. This is not  
5 okay.

6 Street harassment is a form of  
7 sexual terrorism. Women never know when it might  
8 happen, by whom, or how far it could escalate.  
9 Because of street harassment, from a young age  
10 women learn that public spaces are male territory.  
11 They learn to limit the places they go, they try  
12 not to be in public alone, especially at night,  
13 and when they are alone, they stay on guard.

14 No country will ever achieve gender  
15 equality as long as street harassment continues  
16 since it prevents half of the population from  
17 having equal access to public spaces. Ultimately,  
18 street harassment is not just a women's issue, it  
19 is a human rights issue.

20 So what can we do to help women and  
21 girls achieve equality in New York City? The New  
22 York City-based activist groups here today are  
23 suggesting three ideas. One, a citywide street  
24 harassment study that would show the true  
25 prevalence and deep impact of this issue. Two, an

1  
2 anti-harassment PSA campaign at bus stops. And  
3 three, creating harassment free zones around  
4 schools. I agree.

5 The citywide study in particular is  
6 necessary before we can create meaningful policy.  
7 Since I have the opportunity to do so, I want to  
8 suggest, just briefly, four more ideas.

9 The first is age-appropriate sexual  
10 harassment information for students at every  
11 school and every grade level, just as there are  
12 anti-drug and disaster preparedness initiatives.  
13 Sexual harassment training is more relevant to  
14 their daily challenges both in and outside of  
15 school. They should know what it constitutes so  
16 they do not accidentally engage in it and they  
17 should be taught empowering ways to deal with and  
18 report it when they are targeted or when they are  
19 a bystander.

20 Two, well-publicized protocol and  
21 sensitivity training for police officers about  
22 street harassment. On my blog, I've received very  
23 mixed feedback from New York City women who have  
24 reported harassers to police. There must be set,  
25 uniform and appropriate responses from all

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2 officers if we want people to report harassers  
3 and, consequently, if we want harassers to be  
4 deterred from their behavior.

5           Three, signs saying, "How's my  
6 behavior? Call: phone number, if am harassing  
7 you" posted on all public worksites, including  
8 delivery trucks, taxis, and construction sites.  
9 Employers should not tolerate harassment on  
10 company time and this simple sign and phone number  
11 could help deter employees from harassing people  
12 and if it does happen, provide people, including  
13 bystanders, with a straightforward way to report  
14 it.

15           And four, "harassment-free zone"  
16 signs for business owners to post outside their  
17 worksites. Some street harassers congregate  
18 outside stores, restaurants, and bars, and then  
19 harass women walking by and the women entering the  
20 businesses as customers or as employees. The  
21 harassment can make businesses lose customers and  
22 cause employee turnover. By enforcing harassment-  
23 free zones outside their establishments, business  
24 owners could improve their own bottom line and  
25 improve women's lives.

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2 Thank you again for holding this  
3 historic hearing. I know it will result in  
4 positive change in New York City, and I hope other  
5 cities will follow suit and work to address their  
6 street harassment problems.

7 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

8 TRACY HOBSON: Good afternoon, my  
9 name is Tracy Hobson. I'm the Executive Director  
10 of the Center for Anti-Violence Education. We're  
11 based in Brooklyn, but we work throughout the five  
12 boroughs. My testimony in a little more detail,  
13 in a written form, is in the left-hand side of the  
14 folder that I gave you.

15 CAE offers violence prevention and  
16 empowerment and self-defense programs for  
17 communities especially at risk of violence. We  
18 focus primarily on women and children, girls and  
19 teen women. We also work with lesbian, gay,  
20 bisexual and transgender communities and other  
21 communities especially at risk throughout the  
22 entire city. We really work to help build skills  
23 so that people learn how to prevent, counter and  
24 heal from violence. I can talk a little bit more  
25 about what we do and how we do it, but I wanted to

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2 just first testify and tell you a little bit about  
3 what we see.

4 I know you're going to hear a lot  
5 today about a lot of different types of violence  
6 and harassment, so I'm just going to make a couple  
7 of key points. One is that street harassment for  
8 women and girls is sexual harassment. It's often  
9 innuendoes, it's often comments about their  
10 bodies.

11 For young girls, it's sometimes  
12 sort of the first sexual experience,  
13 unfortunately, that they're experiencing. What  
14 we're seeing at the Center for Anti-Violence  
15 Education is that young women are experiencing  
16 this earlier and earlier. It used to be more  
17 teenagers, and now we're actually hearing from 11  
18 and 12-year-olds that they're experiencing this.

19 For instance, we have a program for  
20 boys and girls. Three girls came into our class  
21 and said that they were walking down the street  
22 and they passed by some men and they were making  
23 suggestions and comments, like I was saying  
24 before, to them. We asked them how they felt.  
25 They were 11 and 12. They said four words. They

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said afraid, sad, confused and dirty.

That brings me to my next point which is that the younger these young women are, the less skills that they have to really understand the context of violence and where this is coming from and how it's not their fault. It's much harder for them not to internalize it. That can really affect the way that they start to socialize, the way that they are active or not active, the way that they're leaders or not leaders. So we are concerned about this for teen women and for women, but we're also really concerned about this for younger women too.

I wanted to say that we feel that physical activity is a really important way to help young women feel stronger in their bodies. We offer self-defense, and that includes a whole lot of things to us. From preventing and taking care of yourself and using verbal responses to actual physical responses to getting help and support afterwards. That, to us, is what self-defense really is.

But there's also a lot of studies just about how physical activity in general can be

1  
2 so helpful for young women in boosting their self-  
3 esteem and helping them counter this and feel just  
4 more comfortable in who they are. So that's  
5 something that we offer, but we also just think  
6 that physical activity in schools and any kind of  
7 activity for young women is helpful, in addition  
8 to some of these other things that I wanted to  
9 throw out there.

10 We think that there should be some  
11 kind of education within the schools. This can be  
12 joint with boys and it can also be separate. If  
13 you read a lot of studies, separating boys and  
14 girls can be really helpful for young women to be  
15 able to talk about things that they can't talk  
16 about in front of boys. But we think that also  
17 there are a lot of skills that boys can learn  
18 early on about how they can not be a part of this  
19 behavior, otherwise they don't really know.  
20 Although some do, many do.

21 We also are a part of New Yorkers  
22 for Safe Transit and we're a part of Brooklyn  
23 Girls Collaborative. We also wanted to say that  
24 we would request a study that addresses the real  
25 effects of this harassment.

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2 Then we would also just suggest  
3 that if there are ways to reach out to more  
4 organizations that do work with young people and  
5 who really understand the implications of violence  
6 and can engage young people in conversations to  
7 understand sort of the context of it and not have  
8 them internalize it, that we would really  
9 recommend that. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

11 HARRIET LESSEL: Hi. My name is  
12 Harriet Lessel. I'm the Executive Director of the  
13 New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault. I  
14 want to thank the chair of the Women's Issues  
15 Committee, the other Council Members and the staff  
16 for the opportunity to speak today.

17 The Alliance is a nonprofit  
18 organization that focuses on ensuring access to  
19 best care to all rape and sexual abuse survivors  
20 and promoting primary prevention of sexual  
21 violence, which is preventing sexual violence  
22 before it begins.

23 Sexual violence is defined as any  
24 completed or attempted sexual act against a  
25 person's will or against a person unable to give

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consent.

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It encompasses a continuum of acts ranging from unwanted sexual comments or advances to completed rape. Anyone can experience sexual violence. While the majority of acts are perpetrated by someone known to the victim, anyone can perpetrate sexual violence: a stranger, a person in a position of power or trust, an acquaintance, a relative, a friend or an intimate partner.

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Sexual violence is an issue of basic human rights that has significant impact on public health and the economy. Factoring in costs related to medical treatment, mental health care and lost productivity, it has been estimated that sexual assaults against adult victims alone cost the victims over \$120 billion each year in the United States. I have the citation for that.

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In order to address sexual violence, it is absolutely crucial to address its root causes and the social norms that promote and permit sexual violence. I strongly believe that the prevalence of street harassment of women and girls both results from and contributes to these

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social norms.

The Alliance's main primary prevention program is Project Envision, a six-year pilot project using participatory action research to examine sexual violence in three communities in the city: the South Bronx, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and Williamsburg Brooklyn.

Participatory action research entails giving equal weight to input from those subjects being researched as is given to the knowledge of the experts performing the research.

When asked about what forms of sexual violence were most common in the community, the number one answer in the Williamsburg Brooklyn group was verbal sexual harassment. It's compelling that sexual harassment stood out to community members as a major problem over some of the more egregious acts of sexual violence that were cited, such as child sexual abuse or sexual assault with an intimate partner violence. These are acts that commonly understood to be fundamentally wrong and with profound negative implications on the victims and the society.

Sexual harassment has not yet

1  
2 reached that level of public opinion. Sexual  
3 harassment of women and girls is a form of gender-  
4 based violence that can cause the victims to feel  
5 unsafe or inferior. However, common attitudes  
6 towards harassment are that it is harmless, that  
7 women should develop thicker skin, or that women  
8 ought to be grateful for the attention.

9           If we choose to dismiss sexual  
10 harassment we are sending the message to everyone,  
11 to women, to girls, to boys and men, that we not  
12 only accept but expect women and girls to feel and  
13 be powerless. We are also creating low standards  
14 for men and boys and discouraging healthy  
15 constructive forms of communication. These  
16 conditions form the foundation for a society that  
17 nurtures all forms of sexual violence.

18           The Williamsburg Coalition of  
19 Project Envision is taking steps to mobilize the  
20 community against sexual harassment by engaging  
21 young men in workshops and trainings on  
22 boundaries, communication, and gender stereotypes.  
23 Through this dialogue, the young men will become  
24 leaders in challenging harassment in their schools  
25 and their communities.

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2           The Alliance urges the City Council  
3 to advance the efforts of Project Envision and  
4 others working in this field by acknowledging  
5 sexual harassment to be a serious issue. I think  
6 that this hearing is one step. Specifically, we  
7 would also support a citywide study on sexual  
8 harassment. I would say include its implications  
9 for other forms of sexual violence, since they are  
10 so integrated.

11           I hope that the City Council will  
12 take leadership in shifting social norms by  
13 addressing sexual harassment in the city. Thank  
14 you very much.

15           CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you  
16 very much for testifying. When working with young  
17 boys, do you find them receptive to wanting to fix  
18 this behavior in any of your experiences?

19           TRACY HOBSON: We do. We start  
20 with boys at age 6 up to 12. But it really starts  
21 with a holistic conversation for them, also with  
22 young girls to talk about what it's like for them,  
23 to see what they experience and to hear how it  
24 feels to them. Then, yes, they don't want to  
25 continue that. Sometimes they talk about why they

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2 do it, and sometimes they get pressured, sometimes  
3 they see it at home.

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5 Part of what we do is have  
6 community activist projects, so at the end of the  
7 year they get to decide what they want to do,  
8 maybe something together. So we find that that  
9 can actually help them take active steps in their  
10 schools to try to create change, like anti-bully  
11 posses that have this sort of piece connected into  
12 it.

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14 HARRIET LESSEL: I would add that  
15 the young men that were involved in our photo  
16 voice project, which was a way to document how the  
17 range of sexual violence was experienced in their  
18 community, the young men in the action council  
19 were very engaged and involved and were really  
20 interested in doing something about sexual  
21 violence against women. It was just something  
22 that was very important to them.

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24 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I'd like to  
25 acknowledge Council Member Crowley from Queens who  
26 has joined us. Council Member Chin has a  
27 question.

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29 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yes, I just

1  
2 have a quick question. Some of the suggestions  
3 that you've raised is really great. I hope that  
4 we can get the businesses to start implementing  
5 them. My question is what is your experience in  
6 terms of working with the parents so that they can  
7 empower their kids and also teach the lesson at  
8 home that this kind of behavior is not correct and  
9 how they can protect themselves?

10 HARRIET LESSEL: I think you raise  
11 a very important point that you can't address  
12 sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual  
13 violence with just young people alone. Because  
14 they're going to hear something in school or in  
15 the groups that they go to that are wonderful, but  
16 then they go out into a community that holds  
17 values and has social norms that work against  
18 that. So you really do have to work in a very  
19 broad way.

20 I thought that some of the  
21 suggestions that Holly said, when you start  
22 putting signs in local businesses that this is a  
23 harassment-free zone, that's sending a message.  
24 That's not just reaching young people, that's  
25 reaching adults. It's reaching the people who own

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2 the businesses, who work in the businesses, who go  
3 by the businesses. But it does have to be a  
4 community-wide project.

5 Project Envision in Williamsburg  
6 and in the other sites, that's what it was about,  
7 trying to get a broad section of the community  
8 involved. That's the only way we are going to  
9 change social norms.

10 TRACY HOBSON: Our experience in  
11 working with parents has been primarily presenting  
12 at PTAs and working with the parents around how  
13 they can talk about issues of violence with their  
14 children in a way that's not threatening or scary  
15 for the children. So they can have active  
16 dialogue and try to prevent violence.

17 So we haven't actually addressed  
18 the parent's behavior in what they're doing on the  
19 streets, if that's what you're talking about. But  
20 that certainly is the place where that kind of  
21 thing can come up and we can address it in the  
22 meetings. We do find that parents are very  
23 interested in learning about how they can help  
24 stop violence against their own children.

25 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

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2 We obviously have a couple of experts here and  
3 people that have experience that are going to be  
4 testifying. Thank you for all the work that  
5 you're doing.

6 The suggestions we are going to be  
7 taking very seriously here. We're kind of talking  
8 here about possibly the request for the study.  
9 We've just got to figure out if it's the  
10 Department of Education or the Department of  
11 Health. But this hearing is definitely going to  
12 help formulate the best approach. So I thank you  
13 very much, and keep up your good work. Thank you  
14 for coming.

15 I'd like to call up the next panel:  
16 Emily May from Hollaback, Violet Kittappa, myself  
17 and Hollaback, and Elizabeth Mendez Berry, the  
18 author of the article in *El Diario*.

19 [Pause]

20 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: You may  
21 begin.

22 EMILY MAY: Thanks. My name is  
23 Emily May. I am the Executive Director of  
24 Hollaback. Hollaback is a nonprofit organization  
25 that's been working to end street harassment since

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2005.

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I want to thank the Council Member and the entire Committee on Women's Issues for coordinating this hearing.

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While street harassment has probably existed in our city since the advent of streets, this is the first ever hearing in New York City to specifically address this pervasive issue. It's an absolutely historic occasion, thank you so much.

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Hollaback started right here in New York City and it began because myself and a few friends were frustrated with street harassment. When we walked on, we felt weak. When we yelled at the guys, the situation would escalated, and the police didn't care.

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The most common suggestion for dealing with it was to plug our headphones into our ears and to pretend like it wasn't happening. But something inside us told us that wasn't enough, we wanted to share our stories, and we wanted our fellow New Yorker's to share theirs.

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Five years later, over 1,000 bold women and LGBTQ New Yorkers have told their

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2 stories of street harassment. Their stories have  
3 inspired Hollaback's to launch in an additional 20  
4 cities worldwide including London, Israel, Berlin,  
5 and Buenos Aires. Within the next couple of weeks  
6 we will be launching an iPhone and a Droid app,  
7 making it even easier to Hollaback, and giving the  
8 public the real-time data on this pervasive  
9 problem.

10 At Hollaback, we've heard stories  
11 of women leaving their jobs, or breaking their  
12 lease, or their commutes involving too much street  
13 harassment and so having to leave. We've heard  
14 stories of girls skipping school to avoid daily  
15 harassment and we've heard a surprising number of  
16 stories from women who moved out of New York City  
17 because they just couldn't take it anymore. These  
18 stories come from women and girls in all five  
19 boroughs, representing every ethnicity, from the  
20 ages of 10 to 75.

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

25 Just this week, I had the

1  
2 opportunity to speak with young women at Barnard  
3 and the Little Red School House. Of these 150  
4 young women, 100 percent of them had experienced  
5 street harassment, according to our anonymous  
6 survey tool. As frustrated as each of them was  
7 about street harassment, they were so inspired to  
8 hear that the New York City Council was listening.  
9 Many of them are submitting testimony today,  
10 including Grace, who you'll hear from later.

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

15 We have an historic opportunity to  
16 do something about this. Street harassment is  
17 poised to be the next big women's issue in the  
18 same way that workplace harassment was in the  
19 1980s. It's a gateway crime and it creates a  
20 culture that makes violence against women okay.  
21 And the New York City Council is well placed to  
22 lead the charge, just like you have with so many  
23 battles that have come before this.

24 I know what you're thinking. This  
25 issue is going to be tough to legislate. We could

1  
2 choose to ignore it. After all, that's what we've  
3 been doing for a very long time. But I propose an  
4 alternative, we could choose to work together and  
5 take action, and for it to work, we need to move  
6 quickly.

7 Our ten-year plan is to build a  
8 world where all the baby girls who are rolling  
9 around in strollers today will never have to  
10 experience street harassment the same way that  
11 girls today have. Today, on this most historic  
12 occasion, I'd like to invite you to join us.

13 Here are three initial first steps,  
14 and you'll hear them echoed throughout the day.  
15 We have worked together to create them and want to  
16 make sure that you hear them, so we'll be  
17 repeating them.

18 Number one, we need a citywide  
19 study on the impact of street harassment on women  
20 and girls, including recommendations for next  
21 steps. Number two, we need a citywide public  
22 information campaign that teaches women, girls,  
23 men, and boys that street harassment is not okay.  
24 And number three, we need to establish harassment-  
25 free zones around our schools, similar to the

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drug-free zones that exist today.

New York City's women and girls deserve the freedom to walk down the streets of New York City safely and confidently, without being the subject 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. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you. Can you just say your name?

ELIZABETH MENDEZ BERRY: Hi. My name is Elizabeth Mendez Berry. I'm a journalist. How's this sound?

CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I think you should lower it a little.

ELIZABETH MENDEZ BERRY: Lower it a little. So first of all, thank you to all of you. A huge thank you to Council Member Ferreras and all of you for being here.

Street harassment is an issue that

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affects so many people, and yet I think too often the response has been that we just ignore it and assume it'll go away. Clearly, that hasn't worked and it's time for some action.

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Obviously, you've heard a series of amazing suggestions from a range of people. I guess what I'm hoping to bring to the table is a little bit of the response that I've heard from people around my story, and also in a series of conversations that I've had with young people around the city on street harassment and other issues in gender relationships.

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Like a lot of people who will speak today, I deal with street harassment a lot on my way to the 90th Street 7 train stop in the morning, on my way home at night. I've been harassed by old men, by boys, by weirdos, by regular guys, by construction workers, by men in suits, by New York city police Officers, and many, many more.

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I was really struck by a point that Emily May of Hollaback made at an event for Holly's book *Stop Street Harassment* last month. Harassment puts you on edge to the point where you

1  
2 can't even enjoy a basic "good morning." That's  
3 where we're at, right?

4           In my op-ed, I mentioned an  
5 incident that occurred when I was 13 years old,  
6 the first time I remember being harassed. A  
7 couple of men slowed their pickup truck down, and  
8 followed me down the street yelling what they  
9 wanted to do to me in graphic detail. When the  
10 article came out, what really struck me about the  
11 response is the number of women who say that at 13  
12 they were already veterans of street harassment.  
13 They first experienced it when they were 10 or  
14 even 8 years old. That, to me, is a tragedy.

15           I believe that no woman should deal  
16 with unwelcome commentary on the street. But I'm  
17 particularly concerned about young girls  
18 experiencing harassment at such an incredible  
19 rate. The idea that girls are being forced to  
20 contend with men and boys' desires before we even  
21 have a chance to figure out our own is really,  
22 really troubling. There's a great YouTube video  
23 called "Real Men Don't Holla," that we've been  
24 circulating that's worth having a look at. It's a  
25 group of young girls in Bushwick sharing their own

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stories. I don't think any of them are here today. But it's damning, it's horrifying what they deal with.

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So I wanted to identify a few obstacles that I perceived in my own interactions around this issue, and then also some opportunities for solutions.

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I think one of the huge challenges is the degree to which street harassment is minimized by both men and women. There's a sense that we really ought to just relax and just enjoy the compliments, and a real unwillingness to acknowledge the pervasiveness of this problem and the fear that it inspires.

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In my own experience, the statistics that Holly's pulled together are incredibly helpful in pushing that conversation forward. The fact that 75 percent of women, according to her studies, have been followed. The fact that 57 percent have been grabbed in the street. No wonder we're worried. No wonder we watch our back. No wonder we don't appreciate that compliment that you think we should appreciate. So I think it's important to put it

1  
2 into context. I've found that that's been really  
3 helpful in my own conversations.

4 Then the second is that street  
5 harassment really doesn't get talked about. It  
6 happens so often that it becomes part of the  
7 wallpaper. Women develop armor, which makes  
8 sense. But in the process of trying not to let it  
9 get to us, resignation replaces indignation. We  
10 have to get back to indignation, ladies.

11 We must remind ourselves that it  
12 doesn't have to be this way, that it isn't this  
13 way everywhere. That harassers harass when they  
14 can because they can and because we let them. We  
15 want a different world for our daughters and for  
16 our sons, because what we're talking about is an  
17 adversarial dynamic that harms everybody.

18 Then there's that perception that  
19 keeps coming up and comes up all the time when we  
20 talk about this, which is that women like to be  
21 harassed. Certainly, some women appreciate a  
22 compliment from a stranger. I think insecure  
23 young women, young girls particularly, are  
24 vulnerable to flattery. But I've never met a  
25 single woman who enjoyed being followed, grabbed

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or insulted by a stranger.

To me, it's important to keep the focus on how frequently compliments escalate into insults or worse, so that people understand that this isn't just a question of us being overly sensitive or politically correct. Too many women, myself included, live in fear. We're used to mapping out escape routes, or ducking into shops to lose the guy who's been following us for blocks. It's not fun, but we try to protect ourselves because so many of us have been through the worst case scenario.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about opportunities because I think that's what we're here for. I believe that education is the key to dealing with this issue. If the New York City Council could do just one thing to address street harassment, I believe it should be education.

Children need to learn how to communicate respectfully with each other and also what's okay and what's not okay when dealing with adults. The fact of the matter is that harassers are reaching our girls when they're 8 years old.

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2 We have to talk to them first. They need to know  
3 their rights and they need the boys around them to  
4 be allies instead of enemies.

5 I've written extensively about  
6 domestic violence and have been shocked by the  
7 fact that in this country, despite the fact that  
8 more than a thousand women are killed each year by  
9 their partners, only two states mandate education  
10 about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Two  
11 states: Rhode Island and Texas, where the families  
12 of girls whose boyfriends murdered them advocated  
13 for a curriculum to be included in schools and  
14 they were successful.

15 I strongly believe that bad  
16 relationship and gender dynamics need to be  
17 challenged as early as possible. I encourage New  
18 York to become a pioneer in teaching children to  
19 treat each other with respect. So that's  
20 education.

21 Part two is conversation. One of  
22 the great things about being a journalist is that  
23 you have opportunities to discuss issues with a  
24 wide range of people. I've found that young  
25 people are really eager to discuss this issue,

1  
2 both young men and young women. They're  
3 opinionated. They may not agree with each other  
4 on this, but they want to talk about it because it  
5 affects all of them, their girlfriends, their  
6 boyfriends, their moms, their sisters. And a lot  
7 of young men have told me that they participate in  
8 harassment because their buddies pressure them to,  
9 but when confronted with how they're making girls  
10 feel, they often reassess their behavior. That  
11 makes me hopeful and it makes me believe that we  
12 can do something about this issue.

13           Finally, I have confrontation,  
14 which I think the Hollaback ladies have been  
15 amazing at. Obviously, it's not for everyone and  
16 it's not for every situation, but I've been  
17 pleasantly surprised on a few occasions that when  
18 I respond to harassers and challenge their  
19 behavior, they get the message.

20           Recently, a young man on a bicycle  
21 followed me up my own street at night. When I  
22 asked him to leave me alone, he was surprised and  
23 seemed also embarrassed, as if it had never  
24 occurred to him that a woman wouldn't enjoy being  
25 chased at night. He'd never even thought about

1  
2 how I was going to feel in that situation. I  
3 think a lot of men have just never put themselves  
4 in our shoes. Whether we're in sneakers or we're  
5 in high heels, too often it's a long,  
6 uncomfortable walk home. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.  
8 If you can just say your name.

9 VIOLET KITTAPPA: Hi, I'm Violet  
10 Kittappa. It is a real honor to show support here  
11 today for what I believe to be the most pressing  
12 issue of our day, not just for me and for  
13 Hollaback and the women in this room, but for  
14 everyone.

15 It isn't necessary to shock you  
16 with some of the more disturbing stories of street  
17 harassment that I've heard from my friends,  
18 coworkers, and three younger sisters. If you are  
19 in this room today, you've heard them already, and  
20 chances are, most of you can raise me one better.

21 The tools of violence and  
22 oppression, though, are learned at home, but they  
23 are cultivated on the streets. A young boy  
24 watches his father whistle at a woman from his car  
25 and he tries his own hand at the sport later while

1  
2 hanging out with friends in the park. It makes  
3 him feel bigger and more macho, and he's all of  
4 100 lbs, so no one bats an eye. It's a  
5 compliment, anyway, right? It's harmless.

6 But 20 years later, he is bigger  
7 and more macho, and the whistle no longer serves  
8 him well. He's just lost his job and he's  
9 angrier, his tactics have evolved. He doesn't  
10 move out of the way for a woman passing on the  
11 street, and he blocks her path as she tries to  
12 walk around. He howls at the girls laughing  
13 together on their way to school and leers at the  
14 suited executive who sits down next to him on the  
15 train. By this time, it's not just women anymore  
16 though that he wants to scare, his anger is an  
17 equal-opportunity employer.

18 What begins with a whistle ends  
19 with intimidation and aggression. It is never a  
20 compliment. It is a thinly veiled exertion of  
21 power and masculinity that doesn't aim to flatter  
22 and please its recipient, but to silence and  
23 scare. It isn't courtship, it's provocation, and  
24 it's not harmless, it's bullying.

25 The solution to this problem isn't

1  
2 a self-help book or another self-defense guide,  
3 because the people for whom these sorts of  
4 materials are written are not in need of help and  
5 advice. We're in need of some real change.

6 This isn't a women's issue, and  
7 it's not a feminist concern. This is an American  
8 issue, and a New York City concern. If we start  
9 acknowledging this behavior for what it really is,  
10 bullying, we can work towards creating an  
11 effective and a meaningful solution for a problem  
12 that extends to and affects every person in this  
13 city.

14 Thank you for addressing the  
15 problem today and I look forward to being a part  
16 of the solution.

17 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.  
18 Thank you so much. I know that many of your  
19 suggestions, we're going to be hearing them  
20 throughout and we're going to be hearing the  
21 experiences. But we're definitely taking into  
22 account here and we're trying to figure out what  
23 the best way to address this is. I thank you for  
24 your article. Thank you for your testimony. I  
25 thank you for the nonprofit Hollaback. I have a

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question for Emily. Do you have any statistics specific to New York?

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EMILY MAY: The answer is really no. We're trying to fix that desperately. What we just started doing is actually mapping exactly where street harassment exists. We started it about three weeks ago. We're in the process of going through five years of data to map the old stuff as well.

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The idea behind releasing the iPhone app and the Droid app is that it makes it even easier for people to respond to street harassment. And when you Hollaback through those outlets, it will automatically get mapped on our maps. So when we release those, we project that a lot more data is going to come flooding in on when and where street harassment is happening.

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But I still think that beyond encouraging people to tell their stories, a major study is needed here in New York City. We had one by the Manhattan borough president called Hidden in Sight that focused on the subways. But we've never seen anything on the streets yet.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Well, we

1  
2 hear you. Thank you. Thank you so much for your  
3 testimony. We're going to be calling up our next  
4 panel: Neferriti Martin from Girls for Gender  
5 Equality, Meghan Huppuch from Girls for Gender  
6 Equality and Siheun Song.

7 [Pause]

8 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I thank you  
9 all for bearing with us. This hearing has  
10 obviously brought a lot of New York City residents  
11 out and space is limited since our council  
12 chambers are closed for repair. So I thank you  
13 for bearing with us today. If you can just say  
14 your name and begin, that'd be great.

15 SIHEUN SONG: Sure. My name is  
16 Siheun Song.

17 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Women, I  
18 know you can speak up louder than that. Let's get  
19 closer to the mike.

20 SIHEUN SONG: Are we each saying  
21 our names?

22 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: No, if you  
23 could just say your name and then begin.

24 SIHEUN SONG: My name is Siheun  
25 Song. I was asked to give a testimony today.

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2 When I was in the second grade, a man called our  
3 home, claiming to be calling from the local  
4 library. He said he had a bunch of questions for  
5 me. Even as a 7-year-old, I immediately realized  
6 that this man had an evil intent after he asked  
7 his first question. "You sound like you're a  
8 little tense. Why don't you start by taking off  
9 one of your socks?" We called the cops and  
10 nothing came of it.

11

12 When I was in the ninth grade, a  
13 man took out his penis in the middle of afternoon  
14 and began to masturbate to me on the subway. He  
15 was sitting across from me, but I didn't notice  
16 him, as I was buried in my biology textbook. I  
17 looked up and saw that there were a couple of  
18 other people on the train, who I looked at  
19 pleadingly for help in my moment of panic and  
20 fear. I also immediately understood that the man  
21 was happy I finally saw him.

22

23 I gathered my things and ran off  
24 the subway at the next stop, realizing that he was  
25 chasing me. I never looked back and I did what I  
was told, tell an adult. I ran into a deli off  
the subway stop, tearfully telling them what

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2 happened to me, saying I was unsure if he had  
3 followed me. They called me a cab and I took it  
4 home. My dad tried to console me, jokingly, by  
5 telling me that I should wear heels and kicked  
6 them where it hurt most, if that were ever to  
7 happen to me again.

8           When I was a freshman at Columbia,  
9 another strange call came in, claiming he had  
10 given me an STD during a drunken night. I knew  
11 that his story was not even remotely possible  
12 because I would have never engaged in any of the  
13 activities he suggested, but I was scared out of  
14 my mind and called the cops.

15           Yet again, nothing came of it, even  
16 though both times I knew that the police had  
17 tracked down the phone number of the offenders.  
18 My best hope is that they keep their names and  
19 numbers on record for when they commit a real  
20 crime. Doubtful. There are just too many crazy,  
21 horny men out there who are nothing but scared.

22           Finally, at 25 years of age, I  
23 realized that the best thing to do is act calm and  
24 ignore, while internally planning an exit strategy  
25 to remove myself as far away as possible from the

1  
2 molesters. Because there was a chance that the  
3 man was not just horny and nuts, but also  
4 potentially willing to act out his aggression with  
5 violence or a weapon.

6 As a feisty teen, I would yell back  
7 and give molesters the finger, but I began to  
8 realize that many guys actually enjoyed seeing my  
9 repulsion and reaction. I've also consoled myself  
10 with the state of affairs, having lived for a year  
11 in Buenos Aires where the catcalls and assaults  
12 were infinitely more horrible. It could be worse.  
13 I could have been raped or physically assaulted,  
14 like my dear girlfriends have been. Thank God I  
15 made it this far okay.

16 A male friend has gone as far as  
17 insinuating that my seemingly complacent response  
18 to the molestations was in fact actually a form of  
19 tacit approval. He argues that when I don't stand  
20 up for myself and for what I believe in, I'm  
21 behaving like the Germans who accepted Nazi rule.  
22 My silence doesn't have anything to do with  
23 approval, it's a deep and dark conclusion  
24 accumulating from countless life experiences and  
25 enough trial and error. There is no way to fight

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back and win.

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Usually the molestations occur with no witnesses or no phone records. I know that the law will put my word against his. Ironically, I find myself being as friendly as I can to my offenders so that they will immediately be disarmed by my friendliness and thereby be less likely to escalate their behavior into anything worse. Of course, there are better days, when I have the tenacity to snarl back. But then again, I regret having wasted any breath dreading that I've returned negative energy into the universe and essentially perpetuating a world of hate.

I can only hope that someday there will be a solution between kicking someone in the balls and ignoring the issue.

MEGHAN HUPPUCH: My name is Meghan Huppuch. I'm the Director of Community Organizing at Girls for Gender Equity.

First of all, thank you so much, City Council Member Ferreras and the Committee on Women's Issues, for holding this hearing in recognition of the prevalence and severity of harassment and other forms of violence faced by

1  
2 women and queer folks in the public spaces of New  
3 York City.

4           Just last Saturday, I was in a room  
5 full of 13 to 16-year-old girls co-leading an hour  
6 long workshop about sexual harassment. As we were  
7 reaching the second half of the hour, the topic  
8 shifted to how to stay safe. There are a whole  
9 range of beliefs in this specific area, and they  
10 are usually, and justifiably, based on wisdom  
11 gathered from a friend or family member's negative  
12 experience. Stay silent and avert your eyes, make  
13 eye contact and tell the person to stop, walk  
14 confidently and it won't happen at all, respond  
15 politely so that the situation won't escalate, act  
16 crazy and scare the aggressor away.

17           Because of the age group we were  
18 speaking with another technique was raised, tell  
19 them your age. This quickly became the most  
20 controversial tactic. Some young women in the  
21 circle had experienced success with "I'm thirteen"  
22 as a response to street harassment. Others shared  
23 responses that they had heard when they asserted  
24 their age, such as "after 12 it's lunch" and "14  
25 and over, bend 'em over".

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2 Young women are socialized into a  
3 world that sees them, and encourages them to see  
4 themselves, as sexual objects from extremely young  
5 ages. Young men are socialized into a world that  
6 teaches them that they are meant to exercise  
7 violence, both verbally and physically, on girls'  
8 and women's bodies. To challenge how folks are  
9 socialized is huge. It takes time and requires  
10 cultural shifts as opposed to policy changes. It  
11 necessitates education in place of increased  
12 policing. No matter how challenging, this is  
13 urgent because, as well agree obviously, lives are  
14 at risk.

15 Girls for Gender Equity has a long  
16 history of doing community organizing work and  
17 public education about sexual harassment in New  
18 York City. We have worked for years in  
19 partnership with youth, schools, and community-  
20 based organizations to raise awareness and provide  
21 tools to passionate activists.

22 In 2008, a participatory action  
23 research project led by young women of color and  
24 supported by GGE, provided solid evidence that  
25 sexually harassing behaviors are normalized in

1  
2 schools. That report will be coming out in the  
3 beginning of next year. The Coalition for Gender  
4 Equity in Schools grew out of this specific  
5 research. As a united group of youth, educators,  
6 parents and activists, we focus on utilizing  
7 schools as a point of intervention and prevention  
8 in the cycle of violence.

9           We work to interrupt the spectrum  
10 of violence against women and queer folks in a  
11 space that is legally guaranteed to be safe, but  
12 so many times is not. Schools are much more than  
13 the site of formal education, they are social  
14 environments in which students learn what is okay  
15 to do. If sexual harassment is okay in school,  
16 it's definitely okay on the street. We believe  
17 that provided with the information and space,  
18 youth can create cultural shifts in their schools  
19 and positively influence all other spheres of  
20 their lives and then, in turn, ours.

21           Our fellow warriors in this work to  
22 combat gender-based violence are many: The  
23 Relationship Abuse Prevention Program, Men Can  
24 Stop Rape, the Center for Anti-Violence Education,  
25 RightRides. We have all found our intervention

1  
2 points, whether they're peer education, men as  
3 allies, self-defense, safe rides home. We are out  
4 in the world, challenging existing and persistent  
5 ideas about what it means to be in public spaces,  
6 encouraging women and queer individuals to think  
7 of streets and schools as their own, and then  
8 supporting them to take action to make that real.

9 We encourage the New York City  
10 Council to collaborate with and support these  
11 existing programs to make the necessary cultural  
12 shifts we need for increased safety. Thank you so  
13 much.

14 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

15 NEFERRITI MARTIN: Hello, my name  
16 is Neferriti Martin. I'm a Community Organizer  
17 for Girls for Gender Equity and member of the  
18 Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools. We do  
19 work to end sexual harassment in schools and our  
20 wider communities.

21 Our work against sexual harassment  
22 has found its roots in street harassment, as  
23 seemingly a twisted rite of passage for young  
24 women throughout the neighborhoods of New York  
25 City. As expressed by a male Brooklyn resident in

1  
2 our "Hey Shorty" documentary, it's something you  
3 go through in life, a little bit of harassment.  
4 The normalization of this issue is embedded deep  
5 within the cultures and communities from which our  
6 young women derive their very sense of selves.

7           Our young women are being told that  
8 they are only as good as they look, and they must  
9 exist in the public sphere to satisfy the  
10 heterosexual male gaze. Our young men are being  
11 told that their female counterparts are simply  
12 body parts to ogle and objectify for their  
13 personal pleasure and approval of their peers.  
14 And if a young woman rebuffs their advances to  
15 express this nature, it is okay to reclaim their  
16 sunken pride through escalating to threats of or  
17 actual physical violence.

18           Here is where and why we need to  
19 draw the line at sexual harassment. We must  
20 expose sexual harassment for what it is, as it is  
21 an issue on the continuum of gender-based  
22 violence. It starts by taking it to the streets  
23 where it is intrinsically perpetuated. We must  
24 deconstruct our preconceived notions about what it  
25 is and what it isn't.

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2 This is not our way of not being  
3 able to take a compliment. This is an issue of  
4 safety. Street harassment is not justifiable by  
5 women who wear short skirts or have low self-  
6 esteem. This is a public health issue. It's been  
7 said before, and I'll say it again. This is not  
8 solely a women's issue, this is a human rights  
9 issue. Sexual harassment is not something anyone  
10 should have to go through in life.

11 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I thank you  
12 all for your testimony. As I hear the different  
13 testimony, I remember I guess my first experience  
14 of speed walking was probably because of  
15 catcalling on my way to high school. I used to  
16 have to take the 7 train. I remember there was a  
17 particular bodega that I avoided like it was the  
18 plague. I would try to cross the street anywhere  
19 but there. Then I learned speed walking. That  
20 was the fastest I've ever walked, and I was  
21 probably 14-years-old, in the ninth grade.

22 I'd like to ask Ms. Song a  
23 question. Thank you so much for your testimony.  
24 I heard the frustration in your testimony. I  
25 would love for you to speak to me and please

1  
2 describe the police response when you notified  
3 them. I know you made mention on several  
4 occasions and then you just stopped because you  
5 were just so frustrated. Can you speak to me on  
6 the police response on your reports?

7           SIHEUN SONG: I mean when I was in  
8 the second grade, I was living in Little Neck at  
9 the time. We called the cops and we were told  
10 that they knew who he was and if he did it again,  
11 let us know. Again, when I was at Columbia, I  
12 told the campus police. They said, yeah, we know  
13 who he is. We got the number. We chalked it  
14 down. If it happens again, let us know. I was  
15 like, oh, okay great, thanks. Yeah, great, I  
16 guess I'll do that again with another person.  
17 What if he commits another crime? I guess what  
18 happened to me is not that important. It's got to  
19 be some other big event and then it'll be like  
20 supporting evidence to put him away or actually  
21 really make him face up to what he did wrong.

22           CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I thank you  
23 for that testimony and I think it definitely gives  
24 us a perspective and how we need to start having a  
25 conversation with NYPD and how NYPD receives these

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2 complaints. It isn't okay. Once is enough. We  
3 don't have to wait for it to escalate.

4 I thank you again for your  
5 testimony. It's incredibly powerful. The women  
6 of New York City and the men of New York City are  
7 listening. Thank you.

8 I'd like to call up the next panel:  
9 Quentin Walcott from CONNECT, Becky Weinheimer  
10 from Street Harassment, Natalia Aristizabal from  
11 Make the Road New York and the Pan American High  
12 school. This is the young woman who actually was  
13 part of that young group who approached me in my  
14 district. So I'm very happy to have her here  
15 testifying today.

16 I'd like to recognize Council  
17 Member Jumaane Williams from Brooklyn.

18 [Pause]

19 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Please  
20 begin. Our first male panelist. No pressure.

21 QUENTIN WALCOTT: No pressure, no  
22 pressure. Good afternoon. First of all, I would  
23 just like to thank Council Member Ferreras and all  
24 the other Council Members on the committee for  
25 this opportunity to testify in front of you during

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this important hearing.

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My name is Quentin Walcott from CONNECT. I'm the director of many programs, most importantly, the Training Institute and Community Empowerment Program and Men's Initiatives.

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CONNECT is dedicated to preventing interpersonal violence and promoting gender justice by building partnerships with individuals and communities. We strive to help change the beliefs, behaviors and institutions that perpetuate violence. Through legal empowerment, grassroots mobilization and transformative education, we seek to create safe families and peaceful communities.

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The issue is that street Harassment is a rite of passage for men and boys who derive some definite benefits from it. The young girls and women who primarily bear the brunt of it are forever changed by the experience. Street harassment is a phenomenon that is not exclusive to women and girls in New York City. In fact, it is a widespread and widely accepted behavior and it compromises the safety and freedom of women and girls all over the world.

1  
2           Its roots are embedded in sexism,  
3 patriarchy and misogyny. Sexual harassment is a  
4 tool that we as boys and men fall back on to  
5 publicly demonstrate our deeply embedded attitudes  
6 towards women and girls and to express how  
7 masculine we are to other men.

8           Being born male comes with unearned  
9 privileges, entitlements and expectations that  
10 allow us to negotiate the world in ways that young  
11 girls and women can never experience. We are  
12 socialized to view women as objects and property,  
13 and this thinking is supported inside our homes,  
14 institutions and systems that we navigate on a  
15 daily basis.

16           For some men, sexual harassment is  
17 a demonstration of men's attitudes and belief  
18 systems that falsely raise our collective esteem,  
19 value and worth. Of course, this is at the cost  
20 of women and girls. I say our because, those of  
21 us who don't directly engage in street harassment  
22 behavior still benefit by it when we don't hold  
23 other men accountable when it happens.

24           This behavior benefits us as men  
25 since young girls and women emerge from the

1  
2 experience of being harassed with damaged self-  
3 esteem and self-value. They are deprived of basic  
4 human rights and autonomy that we are afforded to  
5 as men. Sexual harassment is a gendered bullying  
6 that has also to do with one's culture, ethnicity,  
7 race, class, sexuality, sexual orientation and  
8 geographic location. Sexual harassment is not  
9 just verbal, it can be physical and sexual  
10 touching, isolation and stalking, which can lead  
11 to rape and death.

12 At CONNECT we have been gratefully  
13 funded by the City Council to do domestic violence  
14 and gender violence prevention work in New York  
15 City. With that, we are afforded a vantage point  
16 about violence that is a wide and interconnected.  
17 We view many forms of violence that are viewed as  
18 private to have a very public nature, and intimate  
19 violence, often viewed as a women's issue, to be a  
20 men's issue.

21 Street harassment is a form of male  
22 violence against women. It's an issue that men  
23 must take responsibility for; moving from  
24 perpetrators and silent bystanders, to allies and  
25 activists in the work to end male violence against

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women.

Men can play a pivotal role in eliminating family and gender violence, particularly when men commit over 90 percent of the reported cases of the violence. A vital element of CONNECT's work is holding men accountable for the abuse they inflict upon their victims. CONNECT has built a solid foundation of successful men's programming designed to transform men's attitudes towards women, children and other men.

CONNECT's work with men serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it is a strategy to keep women and children safe by doing prevention and intervention work with abusive men, bystanders and male youth. Secondly, CONNECT is helping men recognize and transform their attitudes and belief systems that manifest in abusive behavior.

Our goal is to develop a team of men who ally with women, reach out to other men and children in their respective communities, and develop responses to male and gender violence. CONNECT provides training, capacity building, and technical assistance to organizations,

1  
2 institutions, unions, human service organizations,  
3 from Child Welfare to Head Start to male and  
4 father involvement programs, veteran and reentry  
5 programs and most importantly, youth.

6 One program in particular that  
7 successfully addresses this goal is our young  
8 men's project. This Manhood Development Program  
9 is designed specifically for young men in high  
10 schools and middle schools for young men to  
11 critically examine the cultural and historical  
12 belief systems and gender socializations that can  
13 lead to family domestic, teen dating, gang and  
14 gender violence.

15 Through this program, we look at  
16 abuse with a race, class and gender analysis.  
17 Students explore how young men who are  
18 disenfranchised in society maintain power, male  
19 privilege and entitlement within their intimate  
20 and communal relationships.

21 These root causes that lead to teen  
22 dating violence with other forms of youth and  
23 community violence are investigated. The project  
24 provides a space for these young men to have age-  
25 specific conversations about manhood, male

1  
2 socialization, male accountability, gender  
3 equality, healthy and unhealthy dating  
4 relationships, sibling, and peer relationships.

5 We are grateful to the Council for  
6 supporting this and other unique intensive  
7 programs that are contributing to changing the  
8 culture of male violence and sexism in a new  
9 generation of New York City youth. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

11 BECKY WEINHEIMER: My name is Becky  
12 Weinheimer. I'm sorry, I don't have a printed  
13 testimony. I didn't realize it would be open for  
14 testimony today. I'm the mother of Holly Kearl,  
15 who was the first presenter, who's written a book  
16 on street harassment.

17 As a mother who is an older  
18 generation, when my daughter Holly first came  
19 home, probably when she was in puberty, 12 or 13  
20 years old, saying Mom, some guys were whistling at  
21 me or honking at me." I remember it was with her  
22 friend, who also is a New Yorker. I said to her,  
23 well it's just because you're pretty. I don't  
24 remember saying that, but that's what she told me,  
25 and I'm sure that's what I did say. Because you

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2 just have to deal with it.

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I remember at her age, I had to walk past a work place every day and like you, City Councilwoman, I had to speed walk. It was something that happened every day and I just took it for granted that it was part of what you had to do. So when Holly started fighting against this, it has reeducated me totally.

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I live in New York City. I've been assaulted on the subway. A man stood behind me during rush hour and masturbated up my behind. You know, I don't know how to say that politely, but that's what he did. I had been at Book Expo America and my hands were full of books. It was so crowded, I couldn't move. I'm an author. I had gotten all these books for free for a library that I knew had no books. I got off the subway and I thought, if I just paid \$50, I would have. I felt dirty, I felt violated and this was not a homeless man. This was a man in a suit who did this to me, standing behind me. Once there was an inch or two, I moved.

24

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But I was street harassed twice this week just on the way to the park, just within

1  
2 a block from my house. It happens, and I'm older.  
3 But, you know, the most happy thing I have to  
4 report, which the theme today is about education.  
5 My nephew, who has grown up in Virginia, where  
6 maybe it's okay. We've talked about it. It's the  
7 male thing. He's 20 years old, and he has been  
8 around, living with me for the past year and being  
9 exposed to everything that's going on with Holly  
10 and her book.

11 I have seen him twice now with me  
12 and his cousin. There's a work crew near us and  
13 they whistle down and catcall. He said, hey, stop  
14 that. Show some respect. Then in the cab the  
15 other day, some guys were driving by whistling to  
16 me and my niece. He was sitting with us and his  
17 head out the window and he said stop that, show  
18 some respect. This is a boy who a year ago was  
19 doing the same thing.

20 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.

21 NATALIA ARISTIZABAL: Good  
22 afternoon, everyone. My name is Natalia  
23 Aristizabal. I'm here from Make the Road New York  
24 and I'm also here to talk on behalf of Pan  
25 American International High School, which is a new

1  
2 high school that opened up on 94th Street and 45th  
3 Avenue. It's in a new building. There are  
4 actually four high schools in this building.

5           When I first talked to Julissa  
6 about this issue was because the school was open  
7 new in this area. This area doesn't have a lot of  
8 high schools, so we were really happy to have it  
9 there. The surroundings of the school was not  
10 prepped to have so many students going. The one  
11 school that I'm talking about has 400 students,  
12 and this is one of four schools in this building.

13           So when we started looking at the  
14 area, we started creating suggestions to which we  
15 had addressed the right people for the suggestions  
16 and improvements have been made. But one  
17 specifically that was puzzling and I didn't know  
18 how to do is on the side of the school there's a  
19 small bridge crossing the Long Island Railroad.  
20 Then after that, there is about 7 to 10 mechanic  
21 shops. So this is old men working there all day.

22           It seems like when girls go into  
23 the school and outside of the school, it's fun  
24 time for them. So not only do they view everybody  
25 that's passing, but they have a comment about

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everyone that's passing by, specifically women.

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I bike, and so I park my bike right next to the mechanics. Every time that I pass by on my bicycle, I've gotten a comment. At some point I got out and I said do you not have a mother or a sister. Then they get upset and insulted, right. But when it's another woman that's not from part of the family, they feel that this is okay and that they're doing us a favor. Definitely, talking back doesn't work. It does not get through them.

So after going around in circles and trying to figure out what are some of those suggestions for this area and specifically and in general for New York City, I first understand that this is cultural. It goes back from the homes and it is a heavy issue to address. But I feel that, going back to what we've been saying all day, it's education.

There are different settings of education. First it has to be visual, which I feel is one that's easy to address. Creating citywide campaigns where we're asking people to have harassment-free zones, where we're saying the

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2 lady in the street could be your mother; show the  
3 same respect.

4

5 In this area, specifically, there  
6 is a wall that has nothing or graffiti. It's  
7 right next to a mechanic, so it would be including  
8 somebody who is being the problem into the  
9 solution, which is asking them to provide that  
10 wall and then getting materials and the youth  
11 together with the organization to create a mural.

12

13 I feel like that way they see that  
14 there is youth present, that there's an  
15 organization present and that there's a new  
16 community that's being built in this area.

17

18 They're a part of this community. We don't want  
19 the mechanics to go. They're people of low income  
20 and they need a job. They need to help their  
21 families, but they can learn. It doesn't matter  
22 their age, they can learn. This is very visual.

23

24 I've also thought about having a  
25 community meeting, possibly with, again, the  
26 mechanics, this school and the community  
27 organization being one of the facilitators. Then  
28 lastly, I don't know how the police works. I  
29 don't know if people can make complaints and that

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that complaints can be followed up on.

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Again, this is answer that I was thinking for this year, and specifically I feel like these can be replicated throughout the city.

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you so much. Isn't she great? I thank you very much. You really started this whole movement and awareness. It's my colleagues who have been supportive that we've been able to get a hearing on this.

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Ironically, you all signed in at different times, but you all kind of gave the sense of there's street harassment, this is done by men, but if we educate them, we have an opportunity to remedy the situation. Council Member Barron will say something. But I just want to say thank you very much.

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Jumaane was first, I'm sorry. Council Member Jumaane Williams and then we will have Council Member Barron. The men are speaking up now. I love it. Thank you very much. Please don't go anywhere. You can go ahead, Council Member.

25

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank

1  
2 you, Chair. Thank you for the testimony. I'm  
3 just sitting here amazed and sort of ashamed. I  
4 grew up a young male here and I'm sure I've done  
5 some of these things that I may have thought were  
6 not as impactful as it clearly, clearly is. I  
7 grew up with just my mother and my sister. I'm  
8 sitting here thinking, Lord, my mother probably  
9 had to go through this and my sister had to go  
10 through this. It's just terrible.

11 I'm ashamed and I'm actually glad I  
12 came to this hearing. There are a lot of women  
13 here. The only thing that came to my thought at  
14 certain points was wow, it must be difficult to be  
15 a woman. You step out of the door and you come  
16 home and someone's doing something. But it never  
17 really hit me that there's a mental impact that  
18 comes with that and women have to go through that.  
19 I had no idea.

20 So I'm really ashamed at what my  
21 behavior used to be. I know people who do this  
22 and I kind of brush it aside. I definitely now  
23 won't do that anymore. It must be very hard for  
24 you guys. I don't know what else to say except  
25 that this has really been impactful for me and

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hopefully I can share that with people that I know.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: What's your name again?

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NATALIA ARISTIZABAL: Natalia.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Natalia, I want to move in your area, what can we do? What can really be done about it? It's been happening for a long time. I remember going to the island of Grenada when they had the Grenadian revolution and Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement. They had signs all over the country that set a tone for what they wanted to achieve with the revolution, like respect women, youth empowerment and constantly build, get skills to build the revolution.

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What about signage, some kind of a signage campaign? Like if we can put some legislation together and no catcalls here, punishable, you know, something like that. They've got to pay consequences. I mean we can feel bad and say I'm sorry and all of that, but there has to be some kind of consequences.

Sometimes we make laws in the city,

1  
2 it's just signage, it's not like it's going to be  
3 a whole lot of stuff happening, like no smoking.  
4 Not too many people will get arrested for smoking  
5 in a no-smoking place. No cell phones here, you  
6 know, things like that. What do you think?

7           NATALIA ARISTIZABAL: I think that  
8 we need to have a comprehensive plan around this  
9 and visuals are definitely helpful. I also know  
10 that before this panel, there were other panels  
11 who had studies and who had really good  
12 suggestions about how to implement this citywide.  
13 I feel like visuals are always great. I know that  
14 there are other community organizations in other  
15 cities that have successfully led campaigns on  
16 this. I also know that one example is alcohol. A  
17 lot of the times we see campaigns saying no  
18 alcohol or drugs or any of this.

19           COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Right.

20           NATALIA ARISTIZABAL: So following  
21 up these campaigns. I think that the main thing  
22 is that men need to start understanding that this  
23 is not okay. We don't have a culture of saying  
24 this is not okay. They haven't heard it from  
25 their parents. They haven't heard it from any

1  
2 place. If visually we can start sending the  
3 message, that's the beginning.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: That's what  
5 I think the signage would do is say it's not.  
6 Especially put them near construction sites.

7 NATALIA ARISTIZABAL: And mechanic  
8 sites.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: All over  
10 the construction sites. I think if we had little  
11 street campaigns, like demonstrations. Even if  
12 they didn't do anything, just demonstrating in  
13 front of construction sites. I'd be willing to  
14 work with you on that and any legislation that  
15 comes up here out of this committee, I certainly  
16 would be supportive. Good testimony, because  
17 we've got to get to solutions. Sometimes we major  
18 in the problem and we minor in the solutions. I  
19 thank you for your testimony, all of you.

20 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Council  
21 Member Jumaane Williams had a follow-up.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: One thing  
23 that I don't know if it was mentioned before, but  
24 I know this probably affects kids. There's a  
25 young kid from Flappers to Rappers named the

1  
2 Amazing Kid, I think. He has a rap song called  
3 "Stop Looking at my Mom." It talks about this.  
4 But I'm sure there are people walking with their  
5 children and this is having an effect on the young  
6 people as well.

7 I won't be politically correct when  
8 I say this, but I know this is something that is  
9 affecting primarily men there would be a difficult  
10 attitude towards it. So I want to lend my  
11 maleness as much as possible to this and make sure  
12 that we get our male counterparts involved in  
13 understanding that this is an issue for all of us.  
14 Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you,  
16 Council Member, for loaning us your maleness.

17 [Laughter]

18 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: I am very  
19 excited. We are going to have some really good  
20 things coming out of this. One of them is our  
21 study and possible legislation and campaign and  
22 PSA. Thank you for testifying. I'd like to call  
23 up the final panel: Mandy Van Deven of RightRides  
24 for Women's Safety, Zehra Ali from the National  
25 Organization for Women NYC, Alison Park and Brian

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2 Bradley.

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[Pause]

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CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: You may

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begin.

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MANDY VAN DEVEN: Hi, my name is

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Mandy Van Deven and I'm the Deputy Director of

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RightRides for Women's Safety. I want to thank

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City Council Member Ferreras and the Committee on

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Women's Issues for convening this hearing on

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street harassment. I would also like to thank my

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colleagues, members of the media and concerned

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citizens in attendance for coming here today to

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speak out about this issue.

15

When Maggie Hadleigh West's

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groundbreaking film, *War Zone*, was shown at the

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small student-run cinema on my university campus

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in Atlanta, Georgia in 1998, I sat livid in the

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theater as the credits rolled, and then

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immediately organized with my classmates to bring

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Maggie to our campus to lead a discussion about

22

street harassment.

23

Some 500 students attended that

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event. In 2003 when I moved to New York City, I

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organized the event again, and packed the theater

1  
2 so full that people stood side-by-side and blocked  
3 the aisles. Four years later, I worked with a  
4 group of teen women at Girls for Gender Equity who  
5 were so moved by Maggie's film that they created a  
6 20-minute documentary of their own called *Hey*  
7 *Shorty* that explored the impact of street  
8 harassment as experienced by young women of color  
9 in this city.

10 Today there are several more films  
11 that have been made on this topic including  
12 *Walking Home and Back Up: Concrete Diaries*, some  
13 of which can be viewed on YouTube. Independent  
14 and mainstream media have also covered the issue,  
15 locally, nationally, and worldwide.

16 Holly Kearl and I have both written  
17 books that illuminate the problem in the United  
18 States, and how women are responding to it,  
19 individually and collectively. Yet street  
20 harassment persists.

21 For me, *War Zone* put a name to a  
22 behavior that I endured daily on my way to and  
23 from my college classes. But more importantly, it  
24 validated my fear and anger at having to endure  
25 this hostile behavior and impressed upon me that

1  
2 street harassment was not acceptable and that I  
3 shouldn't be expected to tolerate it. But as we  
4 all know, just because something is wrong doesn't  
5 mean it doesn't happen, and happen often.

6 Survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault  
7 can attest to that.

8           Although I knew what to call street  
9 harassment and that the majority of women and  
10 LGBTQ people are subjected to it regularly, the  
11 result of that knowledge was not empowerment but  
12 an overwhelming sense of futility to stop it.

13 Like other types of gender-based violence, this  
14 one has deep systemic roots and ending it requires  
15 cultural shift in how we think of gender, race,  
16 class, sexuality, and the right to public safety  
17 and space. Cultural shifts are messy, and they  
18 take a very long time. They require resources to  
19 back them, as well as popular support from people  
20 of all genders.

21           Last week at a panel discussion at  
22 Barnard College on feminist responses to street  
23 harassment, a young woman made a comment near the  
24 end of the discussion that mirrored the  
25 frustration and futility I felt over a decade ago,

1  
2 and continue to feel today. She said that while  
3 she appreciates that conversations about street  
4 harassment now happen outside of small, intimate  
5 gatherings with friends and in institutional  
6 settings, like a prestigious college campus, that  
7 she would not be leaving the panel with the  
8 encouraging feeling that street harassment is  
9 coming to an end.

10 She said would be leaving with the  
11 unsettling feeling of its ubiquity and for the  
12 most part invisibility. And the pat response to  
13 her comment that change is happening and that she  
14 can testify before the same city council that just  
15 three months ago cut sexual assault prevention and  
16 victim's services funding wasn't enough. Because  
17 testimony doesn't intervene when the next guy  
18 comes up to you with his entitlement to public  
19 space blazing. And it isn't going to give people  
20 tools they need to respond in that moment or to  
21 mobilize communities to set in motion tangible  
22 results.

23 The point is that while  
24 conversation about street harassment is good and  
25 necessary, it's only lip service when it's not

1  
2 coupled with on the ground action and a commitment  
3 of adequate resources in the service of social  
4 change. There are numerous groups in New York  
5 City doing work to end gender-based violence:  
6 RightRides for Women's Safety, the Audre Lorde  
7 Project, Men Stopping Rape, and the Sylvia Rivera  
8 Law Project are but a few.

9 I ask that you support these  
10 necessary direct service and advocacy  
11 organizations. They are the change makers and  
12 grassroots leaders who are on the front lines  
13 every single day working collaboratively with  
14 communities to make this city a safer place for  
15 women and LGBTQ individuals.

16 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Miss Park?  
17 You submitted your testimony and we've kind of  
18 reviewed, so if you can just make it a little  
19 shorter.

20 ALISON ROH PARK: Okay.

21 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.  
22 I'd appreciate it.

23 ALISON ROH PARK: Sure. My name is  
24 Alison Roh Park. I'm here as an individual, but I  
25 work in media relations at the Center for

1  
2 Constitutional Rights, which is a legal and  
3 educational organization. I'm also a poet and  
4 cultural worker and activist and teach as an  
5 adjunct professor at NYU as part of a grad program  
6 there. Everyone's thanked you, but I'll thank you  
7 again.

8 I'm here because sexual harassment,  
9 street harassment is so prevalent. This is  
10 probably the first time that I've had a validated  
11 public space where I can speak safely about this  
12 issue and talk in conversation about the specific  
13 changes and solutions that we need to shift the  
14 paradigm of sexual harassment and not just develop  
15 a quick fix for it.

16 I'm a lifelong resident of Queens.  
17 I've been in New York City public schools my whole  
18 life, until I went to Fordham for college. I have  
19 always lived in multiracial and multiethnic in  
20 mixed class neighborhoods with visible gay,  
21 lesbian and transgender communities. For that,  
22 I'm grateful.

23 The first time I recognized sexual  
24 harassment, I was 11 years old. My sister, who  
25 was 14 at the time and already, I'm sure, was a

1  
2 veteran, used to take a 14-block walk under the 7  
3 train between home and church. At 11 years old,  
4 the men who were along Roosevelt would leer at us,  
5 block our path and prevent us from walking  
6 forward, come really close to us, hiss, whistle or  
7 make kissing sounds and make other obscene  
8 gestures or even follow us.

9           As a young girl at a critical  
10 developmental age and learning how to have healthy  
11 relationships with boys and men, these experiences  
12 left me powerless. I was too young to define sex  
13 or sexuality or sexism and sexual violence, to  
14 understand what exactly was happening to me. But  
15 the daily experience of street sexual harassment  
16 profoundly inhibited my self-esteem.

17           The advice and comments I received  
18 from the women and men around me then and now have  
19 been: to toughen up, to ignore them, don't let it  
20 get to you, what were you wearing, then don't walk  
21 down that street, that's just how guys are, you're  
22 too thin-skinned, or there's nothing you can do  
23 about it.

24           The times that I've tried to  
25 confront my harassers, I was met with curses and

1  
2 insults, derisive laughter, or the situation would  
3 escalate to violence or the threat of physical  
4 violence. Like with public sexual assault or  
5 rape, passerbys often were silent or completely  
6 ignored the situation.

7           During those years as a victim or  
8 observer of sexual harassment, as a woman of color  
9 and an Asian America woman, it was also made clear  
10 that harassment is often compounded by racist  
11 slurs or sexual stereotypes. I also learned that  
12 for women and girls, the New York City public  
13 transportation system is also as unsafe a space as  
14 its own streets. I was 14 when I had my first  
15 masturbator experience on the E train.

16           I will skip the other various  
17 examples, but I do want to talk about the police  
18 and the role that the police play in sexual  
19 harassment and the solution to it. I've actually  
20 commonly witnessed sexual harassment by police  
21 officers who use warrantless stops to intimidate  
22 women who do not respond to their flirtation or  
23 sexual advances, who abuse their power to demand  
24 phone numbers and home addresses. A friend of  
25 mine was propositioned for sex by a police officer

1  
2 in his patrol car when she was 14-years-old, in  
3 Ozone Park. Another who experienced sexual  
4 assault by a police officer under the guise of a  
5 stop-and-frisk.

6 I also want to note that the  
7 experiences that I'm speaking only represent my  
8 experience as cisgender woman. That means that I  
9 am comfortable being the gender that I was  
10 assigned at birth. But because sexual harassment  
11 is about reinforcing gender roles and  
12 expectations, placing limitations on what people  
13 can and cannot do and where they can and cannot  
14 go, it regularly results in serious violence and  
15 death against gay, lesbian, queer gender, queer  
16 and transgender New Yorkers.

17 Sexual harassment reinforces and  
18 nourishes these systematic limitations,  
19 dehumanization, objectification and sexualization  
20 of women and violence against these historically  
21 marginalized or forgotten communities every day  
22 and every single minute of those days.

23 I wanted to talk a little bit about  
24 the role of media, but hopefully there's someone  
25 else who will do that. But youth access to

1  
2 violent images, violent sexual images and  
3 entertainment that exploit women's bodies, that  
4 has to have a relationship to this really crazy  
5 rise in domestic violence and sexual assault  
6 that's been reported across the country. A  
7 government-funded report actually showed a 42  
8 percent increase between 2006 and 2008 in reported  
9 rape and sexual assault and domestic violence. We  
10 all know that a lot of people don't actually  
11 report those crimes.

12 Finally, the solutions part, but  
13 more of what not to do. Though I'm most familiar  
14 with street sexual harassment as it occurs in my  
15 own community, I've been harassed by men of all  
16 races and ethnicities in difficult neighborhoods  
17 throughout this city. But because racism is so  
18 deeply embedded in all aspects of our society, and  
19 men of color are stereotyped as violent sexual  
20 predators, it's important to recognize that though  
21 there are different cultural expressions and  
22 racial and class context of sexual harassment,  
23 it's the underlying male supremacy and existing  
24 gender roles that create a situation where sexual  
25 harassment is okay and women are not safe in

1

2 public spaces.

3

4 To rely solely on the legal or  
5 judicial system as a quick fix to street sexual  
6 harassment will only result in the criminalization  
7 of people of color and guarantees unequal access  
8 to enforcement of any such policies. My  
9 organization released a report this week on NYPD's  
10 stop-and-frisks using its own data, and it's a  
11 clear example of how policies and laws and police  
12 practices can be used on the basis of race and not  
13 crime, for instance, and how these things are  
14 manipulated by institutions and they're agents to  
15 the detriment of communities of color.

16

17

18

19

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25

The same goes around immigration  
enforcement, for instance, like policies that are  
supposed to enforce federal and civil law are  
preventing undocumented survivors of domestic  
violence or sexual assault to not report crimes to  
the police for fear of deportation.

The solution must be crafted by  
communities whose realities are often ignored.  
That includes solutions that definitively include  
women of color, poor and homeless women,  
differently abled women, immigrant women and

1  
2 youth. It's essential that men are part of the  
3 solution to do the work that needs to be done to  
4 shift boys' attitudes towards women. Any remedy  
5 should be representative in its benefit as well.

6 Finally, in the way that  
7 masculinity, sexism and self-worth are learned  
8 constructs in our society, they can also be  
9 unlearned if we work together for equal access to  
10 public space for all New Yorkers.

11 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you.  
12 Your testimony in its entirety will be on the  
13 record, so thank you. You can continue.

14 ZEHRA ALI: Good afternoon. Thank  
15 you, again, for this opportunity to testify about  
16 the critical issue of street harassment against  
17 women and girls in New York City. My name is  
18 Zehra Ali. I'm testifying on behalf of Sonia  
19 Ossorio, Executive Director of the National  
20 Organization for Women's New York City Chapter.

21 Street harassment creates an  
22 uncomfortable and often hostile environment on the  
23 streets of New York City. We no longer tolerate  
24 harassment in workplaces and it should not occur  
25 on New York City streets as well.

1  
2 Is it any wonder that one in three  
3 women are raped in their lifetime or that sexual  
4 assault occurs every two minutes in the United  
5 States? There are countless accounts of women who  
6 feel uncomfortable going about their daily  
7 routine, walking to work or to school or boarding  
8 a subway train, with the threat of an unwanted  
9 comment or physical interaction directed their  
10 way. We need to recognize that these are not  
11 isolated incidences. This is harassment. How can  
12 we expect a change in these statistics, when our  
13 culture is normalizing this form of harassment?

14 Street harassment undermines the  
15 respect that women and girls deserve in society.  
16 There needs to be a standard established that  
17 reinforces that harassing women is illegal and not  
18 acceptable. Public education campaigns citywide  
19 is one of the first steps to address this problem.  
20 This would mean public service announcements at  
21 bus stops and in the subways that will illustrate  
22 to New Yorkers that street harassment is not okay.

23 A volunteer with our organization  
24 actually noted that while she was on a subway  
25 train, a man had grabbed her from behind. After

1  
2 she yelled at him and told him that it was  
3 inappropriate, the man yelled back at her. Due to  
4 the social awareness of a nearby onlooker, who  
5 informed the police of this incident, the man was  
6 handcuffed shortly after by police officers and  
7 was walked out of the subway station.

8           Creating harassment-free zones  
9 around schools is another measure to consider.  
10 Girls are now being victimized from a younger age  
11 and it reinforces that these streets are not safe  
12 for them. However, they should be, especially  
13 within a close vicinity of schools. These zones  
14 would function much like the drug free zones and  
15 be monitored to ensure that no harassment occurs.  
16 Drug free zones have worked, and this can too.

17           In addition, we also support the  
18 idea of tracking the occurrences of street  
19 harassment so we can understand the magnitude of  
20 the problem citywide. These along with powerful  
21 public service announcements and the tracking of  
22 these cases can help us combat this daily plight.

23           These are all viable first steps to  
24 eradicate the objectification and violence that  
25 women must deal with in their everyday lives.

1

2

BRIAN BRADLEY: Hello, everybody.

3

How you all feeling? You all good? Everybody

4

good? If you don't know me yet, my name is Brian

5

Bradley, but my stage name, professional name is

6

The Astronomical Kid, also known as Astro. I'm

7

here today to speak against sexual harassment. I

8

prepared a speech, so if I may.

9

I'd like to thank Rachel Cardero

10

and the New York City Council Committee on Women's

11

Issues' invitation to speak before you today. As

12

street harassment of women and girls is an issue

13

my mom and countless other women and young women

14

are forced to deal with on a daily basis.

15

Some might say that me being a 14-

16

year-old boy doesn't qualify me to speak as an

17

authority on this particular subject, but I

18

disagree. I'm not just a 14-year-old boy, I'm

19

also a big brother to a younger sister. Her name

20

is Regan Ellis. I'm the son of a single mother

21

who struggles every day with the humiliation

22

brought on to her by the unwanted, unprovoked

23

attention of disrespectful men every time she

24

leaves the house.

25

Personally, I don't think that

1  
2 anyone deserves to be subjected to catcalling and  
3 lowered remarks as they are only trying to go  
4 about their daily lives. In my opinion, that kind  
5 of behavior is rude and degrading and there is no  
6 excuse for it. I can only speak on behalf of me  
7 and my mother when I tell you that it is  
8 offensive. It's offensive to her as a woman and  
9 it's offensive to me as her son who believes that  
10 she, along with all women, deserves to be treated  
11 with the utmost respect.

12 Now, I am not an advocate for  
13 violence and I don't recommend anyone take that  
14 route. Instead, I decided to use my platform as a  
15 recording artist to bring attention to street  
16 harassment of women and girls to let the world  
17 know that such behavior is not acceptable. I am  
18 hoping that my song, titled *Stop Looking at my*  
19 *Moms*" will serve as a wakeup call to men and women  
20 alike. I wrote it to let me know that vulgar,  
21 aggressive language toward women, especially when  
22 they are with their children, is highly  
23 inappropriate and to let women know that it's okay  
24 to expect and even demand a higher level of  
25 respect.

1  
2 With that being said, I am not by  
3 any means telling men not to speak or look at a  
4 woman, I'm only asking that they be more  
5 respectful in their approach. That's all I have  
6 to say for today. Thank you very much.

7 [Applause]

8 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you so  
9 much for your testimony. I think today's  
10 testimony kind of evolved, right? So we started  
11 off with the issue, we had the experts speak, then  
12 we had some of our victims speak and then we  
13 transition into the male perspective. Then we're  
14 hearing from the very young men who we are saying  
15 that we should educate and mobilize. This is the  
16 result. I hope that this is mimicked throughout  
17 our city. I am so proud of you. Thank you so  
18 much for coming today to testify. I know that you  
19 came running here from school. I appreciate it.  
20 We will be looking out for you, Mr. Recording  
21 Artist.

22 BRIAN BRADLEY: You can check out  
23 the video *Stop Looking at my Moms* on YouTube and  
24 purchase the single on iTunes. So support it if  
25 you can.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you so  
3 much.

4 [Applause]

5 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Council  
6 Member did you want to say anything?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: It's a  
8 good song.

9 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: It's a good  
10 song. Wonderful. Thank you so much. We have one  
11 more panel with two members. Thank you again.  
12 Thank you so very much for coming to testify  
13 today. We are definitely taking all of your  
14 testimony into account. I'd like to call up Grace  
15 Tobin and Leah Todd

16 [Pause]

17 GRACE TOBIN: My name is Grace  
18 Tobin. I live in Brooklyn. I'm in 11th grade at  
19 Elisabeth Irwin High School. Thank you so much  
20 for holding this hearing today to listen to the  
21 stories and issues faced by so many New York girls  
22 and women every day.

23 I cannot remember the last time I  
24 walked out of my house and returned home that  
25 night without being sexually harassed at some

1  
2 point during the day, be it a slimy grin and the  
3 threatening eyes, or the erection digging into my  
4 back in a sardine-like packed train.

5           The subway is where I experience it  
6 the worst. My phone does not work on the subway.  
7 I cannot quickly move away or off the train. I am  
8 completely alone. But this should not have to  
9 mean that I am completely vulnerable.

10           The moment which I have felt most  
11 degraded, belittled, and humiliated was at 6 p.m.  
12 on a Saturday getting onto the 1 train at Chambers  
13 heading Uptown. I got on and noticed everyone was  
14 on one side of the train. I didn't think too much  
15 about it and sat down on the two-seated bench  
16 furthest away from everyone. The doors closed and  
17 the train moved out of the station.

18           I suddenly noticed a man sitting  
19 across from me I hadn't seen before. He was  
20 white, old, and wearing a big tan jacket and a  
21 baseball cap. He had a friendly face. His eyes  
22 flashed up to meet mine and I quickly dropped my  
23 gaze into my lap. I didn't want to make eye  
24 contact with him. Just like with any other  
25 stranger, I was worried that he was going to

1  
2 misinterpret my eye contact. But it is  
3 ridiculous, really, that I feel I cannot look a  
4 stranger in the eye because it would give him some  
5 reason to think I may be provoking or leading him  
6 on in some way. Has it really gotten to the point  
7 where I have to watch and reserve my every move I  
8 make just make sure that he doesn't make one of  
9 his own?

10 He shuffled his hands in his  
11 pockets. The train stopped at Franklin Street.  
12 No one got on. The train doors closed and started  
13 on again. He was fidgeting again, from what I  
14 could see out of the corner of my eye. I glanced  
15 up at him, against my better judgment. The hands  
16 I thought were in his pockets were not. They were  
17 under the big sides of his tan coat, masturbating.

18 I can't even remember what I felt  
19 at that moment. It was such a rush of so many  
20 emotions; it all washed over me and made me feel  
21 smaller than ever. "Don't look in his eyes," I  
22 told myself, trying to keep calm, telling myself  
23 that this wasn't really happening. How could  
24 someone possibly comprehend doing this? I tried  
25 to concentrate on my hands. They were turning

1  
2 ghostly blue as I squeezed them so tightly for any  
3 sense of comfort or release of pain, whichever one  
4 it was. I looked up, only to realize the one  
5 thing above all I wished was not true. He was  
6 staring right back at me.

7 I guess I must have been angry. I  
8 don't think I could feel it though. My fear and  
9 shock overpowered everything else such as the  
10 shame and embarrassment. The vulnerability and  
11 victimization. The fact that I was frozen, unable  
12 to say a thing. Unable to move and unable to  
13 fully comprehend or at least not letting myself.

14 The train stopped at Canal. "Why  
15 me? Why now? What do I do?" I screamed at myself  
16 inside. I thought I was going to explode. I knew  
17 that I should move or say something, anything. I  
18 wanted to get off then. I wanted to run off the  
19 train so badly. I wanted to scream at the man,  
20 who was so sick in the mind and inconsiderate, I  
21 just wanted to hurt him.

22 I just wanted to yell at the other  
23 people on the train, all huddled on the other  
24 side. They knew something was wrong, I could read  
25 it in their poker faces. I was in despair, and

1  
2 they did nothing. They didn't even glance in my  
3 direction.

4 I was in an incomprehensible state.  
5 I stared longingly at the platform. My eyes  
6 fixated, yearning to drag my body out of this  
7 nightmare, off the train, or even onto the next  
8 car. But I was stuck. Crushed. I did not move.  
9 I did not say a thing.

10 The doors closed and the train  
11 moved away from the platform again. I stared down  
12 at my hands, concentrating on their wrinkles and  
13 creases.

14 I blame myself for this event. I  
15 could have moved to the other side of the train.  
16 I could have yelled at the creepy man. I could  
17 have gotten off at Franklin or Canal. I could  
18 have asked for help. But in the moment, I just  
19 could not do it. I ignored the masturbation five  
20 feet in front of me and suppressed my feelings. I  
21 clenched my jaw and carried on, just the way all  
22 girls and women seem to react to the harassment  
23 they face every day.

24 I got off at Houston, as quickly as  
25 possible. I was relieved to even be that far away

1  
2 from the stranger. But at the same time the  
3 relief settled in, a wave of anger and regret  
4 panged inside my chest. I almost instantly wished  
5 that I could have gotten back on that train and  
6 had the courage and power to stand up to the  
7 stranger and let him know, in any way possible  
8 that he was sick, that what he did was messed up,  
9 that I shouldn't be blaming myself for it. That  
10 he was in the wrong and should be punished. It's  
11 basic morals, taught from when you're a kid. He  
12 had no right, yet he got away with it.

13 I walked up to the street and  
14 continued on that day. I did not think to mention  
15 it to anyone because it did not seem to matter.  
16 Who would care? And even if they did care, what  
17 could they possibly do about it now? I cannot  
18 tell you how many times I wished I could have  
19 gotten back on that train and done something.

20 I did not know what to do for a  
21 while. But once Hollaback came to visit my class,  
22 I knew there was something I would do. I did not  
23 know that what happened to me was not unusual.  
24 That men frequently masturbated openly to girls  
25 and women on the subway. I am one of many cases.

1  
2 I did not experience anything out of the ordinary  
3 life of a girl living in New York City.

4           But how messed up does that sound?  
5 How morally contorted are we that young girls are  
6 normally subject to degrading public  
7 embarrassment? How messed up is this system that  
8 if I hadn't heard about the Hollaback  
9 organization, that if I hadn't heard about this  
10 hearing, I would still be burying these feelings  
11 inside, internalizing my pain and blaming myself  
12 for all the wrong that this strange man had done  
13 to me.

14           I was not wearing anything to  
15 provoke him that day, just jeans and a t-shirt.  
16 But that should not have to matter. As my right,  
17 I should be able to wear what I want not having to  
18 worry about men taking advantage of me. I  
19 shouldn't have to leave social outings at 9:30  
20 p.m., early for me, when it just considered too  
21 late for a girl to be taking the train alone at  
22 that time. I should not have to worry about the  
23 man at the Chambers Street who every single  
24 morning compliments me with a sexual subtext in  
25 his words.

1  
2           Once, I was walking once just  
3 behind the playground of my school courtyard. I  
4 was not three feet away from the school premises  
5 when from behind, a man came up and pressed his  
6 body against mine. I could feel the heat of his  
7 skin, I could smell his hot stale breath as he  
8 blew my hair. "Nice ass," he yelled in a loud,  
9 rude, and hostile voice. It was like he was  
10 putting me in my place, hammering me down, and  
11 reminding me of his authority and control over me.  
12 I felt helpless, a feeling I knew was exactly his  
13 goal, consciously or not.

14           I want other girls to know about  
15 organizations like Hollaback. I want girls to  
16 know how to handle the terrible situations they  
17 encounter on the subway. I want people on the  
18 trains to help when they see something happening.  
19 I want to be able to ride the subways without  
20 having to be so constantly alert and cautious. I  
21 want to be able to wear what I want without it  
22 being an instigator for harassment. I want to be  
23 able to live in this city without having felling  
24 below or undermined simply because I am a girl.

25           Thank you so much for hearing me

1  
2 out. I thank you for listening to my stories that  
3 I have shoved to the back of my mind for so long,  
4 keeping them bottled up and disregarding them.

5 But please remember, that the  
6 experiences I shared are not unusual. They happen  
7 on a daily basis. I do not know one girl or woman  
8 in my life who has not experienced some form of  
9 sexual harassment. I am sure that this is true  
10 for many other females that you all know too. It  
11 is happening every day here in our city. I am  
12 only 16, and already I cannot remember half the  
13 traumatic experiences that I have had due to male  
14 harassment. Thank you for listening, and please  
15 remember how great a help you all can be.

16 [Applause]

17 LEAH TODD: Thank you for this  
18 opportunity to speak to you today about this long-  
19 neglected issue. After spending three years  
20 running Safe Walk, a program aimed at preventing  
21 street harassment and assault, in addition to my  
22 current volunteer work with survivors of sexual  
23 assault through Support New York, I have been  
24 exposed to harassment and its effects in many  
25 forms. Many of us here have worked on such

1  
2 programs. We have been left to struggle as  
3 community members against sexual harassment and  
4 assault despite the lack of support or even  
5 recognition from the city on this issue.

6 I echo the demands of my fellow  
7 speakers for a citywide study, street harassment-  
8 free zones, and a PSA campaign as first steps  
9 towards a safer city. But I would like us to  
10 broaden the idea of how street harassment  
11 manifests and connects to other forms of violence.

12 Perhaps the city has not yet acted  
13 on this issue because officials do not understand  
14 that violence happens along a continuum rather  
15 than suddenly and randomly. In other words, every  
16 harassing action has the potential to lead to  
17 violence, and frequently does. It is not merely  
18 that we are annoyed at street harassment, it's  
19 that this behavior poses a very real threat to us.

20 Here is an example. While  
21 volunteering for the SafeWalk program, I met many  
22 people who feared gay shames, and given the  
23 recent assault at Stonewall Inn, the fatal attack  
24 on the Suczhaiay brothers, the near-deadly  
25 beating of Jack Price, and myriad other incidents

1  
2 all over the city, this is a very real and  
3 immediate concern. But these assaults do not  
4 happen in a vacuum, they begin with name-calling  
5 and other harassing behavior.

6 This widespread fear speaks to the  
7 fact that New York is simply not a safe place for  
8 New Yorkers who do not fit gender stereotypes,  
9 people who are genderqueer, transgendered, or who  
10 are perceived to violate the bounds of binaristic  
11 gender roles or heteronormatively in some way.

12 There's Sakia Gunn, a 15 year old  
13 girl who was killed in Newark when she responded  
14 to unwanted harassment by saying she was a  
15 lesbian. This happened within the past few years,  
16 within this region.

17 Or, take the case of seven young  
18 lesbian women who were on their way home mere  
19 blocks north of here in the West Village. They  
20 came from the same community as and knew of Sakia  
21 Gunn. They were sexually harassed by a man on the  
22 street, who despite their refusals, followed them,  
23 saying "I'll (blank) you straight, sweetheart",  
24 words that function as a verbal threat of rape.

25 The violence escalated into an

1  
2 attack. He pulled their hair, spit on them, threw  
3 a lit cigarette, and began strangling one of the  
4 women. The women fought back. Yet, the City's  
5 response to Duane Buckle's appalling behavior was  
6 to arrest these women on charges of gang violence.  
7 At least one, Patreese Johnson, remains in jail.  
8 The women were vilified as a lesbian wolf pack in  
9 the media, mocked in court for their gender  
10 expressions and sexual identities, and convicted  
11 by an all white jury.

12 This was a situation where the City  
13 could have done something about this issue, and  
14 instead chose to railroad these women.  
15 Unfortunately, as evidenced by the many incidents  
16 I referenced earlier, when there is no public  
17 response to street harassment and assault, people  
18 are left with the choice of defending themselves  
19 or risking serious harm, even death.

20 I am pleased to see that city  
21 officials may begin to take this behavior  
22 seriously, but in doing so, I urge you to take it  
23 seriously against people of various gender  
24 identities. And if the city finally starts to  
25 recognize these behaviors as the violent acts that

1  
2 they are, it must also recognize the actions  
3 people take in self-defense as self-defense,  
4 regardless of the victim's race, sexual identity  
5 or gender expression.

6 Perhaps the measures many people  
7 have asked for, such as a PSA campaign or citywide  
8 harassment study, will help us move towards a city  
9 that makes harassment obsolete. For the sake of  
10 those who we have lost to violence, we can and  
11 should do more to get there. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON FERRERAS: Thank you  
13 very much for your testimony. As we wrap up this  
14 hearing, I'd like to thank all the women who have  
15 come forth, and the men and New York City  
16 residents, because not only have you come out for  
17 a very important issue, and I'm glad that you're  
18 out here to support. But also know that this City  
19 Council is your home and you should be aware of  
20 other hearings that are very important to your  
21 community and you should come out and support  
22 hearing on various topics that affect New York  
23 City residents.

24 So I'm very happy that you're here  
25 for my Women's Issues Committee, but as I always

1  
2 say, a women's issue is all issues. All of our  
3 issues are important and they are definitely  
4 reflected in every other committee that comes  
5 before the City Council. I thank you all for  
6 coming today.

7 Your suggestions are definitely  
8 going to be followed up on. I heard PSA, I heard  
9 our survey, which we're going to be working on.  
10 We're trying to identify which agency to do that  
11 through, the Department of Health or the  
12 Department of Education, or maybe both. We're  
13 going to continue to see how other legislative  
14 turns we can take. Thank you, Hollaback. Thank  
15 all of you for coming today.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Donna Hintze certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date November 23, 2010