

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Street Harassment Prevention Act (SHPA) became effective on October 1, 2018. SHPA is a first-of-its-kind legal measure in the United States that: (1) creates a legal definition of street harassment; (2) establishes a community-based Advisory Committee to study street harassment and develop model policies and trainings; and (3) requires a public information campaign on street harassment. It was designed to focus uniquely on prevention through education instead of criminalization.

The Advisory Committee on Street Harassment (ACSH) has 16 official members and many others who also participated in the work of the Committee. ACSH meets regularly and has four subcommittees: survey, public awareness, trainings, and reporting. The subcommittees, along with the Office of Human Rights, helped accomplish the tasks required by law, the results of which are outlined below and detailed in the full report.

One of the first accomplishments of implementing SHPA was collecting data on street harassment prevalence and experiences in the District. Survey responses were collected from 1,621 District residents; their responses painted a clear picture of street harassment:

1 | Street Harassment is common in the District.

Most individuals (69%) surveyed had experienced verbal street harassment in DC in the prior six months; 40 percent reported that they had experienced physical street harassment.

2 | District residents are experiencing street harassment frequently.

Among those individuals who had experienced verbal street harassment in the previous six months, 22 percent experienced it daily and 37 percent experienced it weekly. For those who experienced physical street harassment in the previous six months, 25 percent experienced it daily and 30 percent experienced it weekly.

3 | Street harassment most often occurs in public places and is perpetrated by strangers.

Street harassment most frequently occurs on the street or sidewalk, on public transportation, and at nightlife venues. And the people most often doing the harassing are other pedestrians, other passengers, and neighborhood people or people hanging around.

4 | Street harassment experiences start young.

Fifty-two percent of respondents first experienced street harassment before they turned 18 years old.

5 | Street harassment affects the behavior and emotional state of victims.

Fifty-four percent of respondents were so affected by their experiences with street harassment that they changed their route or regular routine as a result; 34 percent reported feeling anxiety or depression; and 29 percent of respondents stopped going to a restaurant, bar, or club.

6 | Vulnerable communities experience higher rates of street harassment.

The respondents that identified with the LGBTQ+, disability, and/or immigrant communities consistently reported higher rates of street harassment throughout the survey.

During fall 2019, ten two-hour focus groups were conducted with various vulnerable populations: people experiencing homelessness, transgender and gender nonconforming¹ individuals, immigrant communities,

¹ Some gender non-conforming/non-binary individuals use the pronouns they/them/theirs. The singular they is used throughout the report to reflect the proper pronouns of focus group participants/survey respondents/etc and to also help ensure anonymity of focus group participants.

religious minorities, college students, and sexual violence victims/survivors. The goal of conducting focus groups was to hear the experiences of people within populations the Advisory Committee believed to experience greater levels of street harassment, whose experiences could be difficult to capture in the survey. The focus group discussion covered topics such as participants' experiences with street harassment, the impact of harassment on them and their lives, the times at which and places in which they most commonly experienced harassment, their experiences with bystander intervention, what would make participants feel safer and more supported, and more. The participants' responses added rich qualitative data to supplemented the quantitative data collected in the survey.

In August 2019, OHR launched a public awareness campaign which included five versions of an informative ad on street harassment and a website with further information and resources. The ads were placed inside 250 buses, on five Capital Bikeshare docks, and at 20 bus shelters for at least four weeks. The ads had four components: (1) the words "I don't need your comments on my..." and three items that correspond with the featured identity (sex, religious minority, homelessness, race, and LGBTQ); (2) various high-risk areas for street harassment, as outlined in SHPA; (3) clarification that "if it's unwanted, it's street harassment"; and (4) an invitation to learn more at our website and our hashtag #NoStreetHarassmentDC.

SHPA requires recommendations on the following areas: trainings, reporting, and policies. Below are summaries of our recommendations that are detailed in the full report.

1. Trainings

We recommend two types of training - in-person Bystander Intervention & Self-Assertion (BISA) training and online Street Harassment Prevention for DC Government employees training; those deemed public-facing employees would be required to take the in-person training. We recommend experts in the field provide train-the-trainer trainings to selected government employees, who would then conduct BISA workshops for the required employees. We recommend the field experts also conduct BISA workshops for government contractors who work heavily with the public and for City Council staff who interact regularly with constituents, create content for the online training, and conduct 16 public BISA workshops (two per ward).

2. Reporting

We recommend a reporting portal to which victims and witnesses of street harassment could report incidences of street harassment for data collection. This reporting mechanism should be done through a nonprofit-government relationship, with the nonprofit responsible for receiving the reports, responding to the reports, and securely maintaining the data collected, and the government agency responsible for marketing the reporting mechanism, collaborating on crafting any responses, funding the nonprofit (through a grant), and publishing aggregate data on an annual basis.

3. Policies

We recommend District agencies use model policies to help address the challenges of street harassment. We recommend the model policies have the following seven components: code of conduct; defining street harassment; statement of confidentiality; reporting street harassment; responding to street harassment; resources; and training and awareness. Street harassment could be perpetrated by community members towards District employees, by employees towards community members, by employees towards other employees, or in any other direction; additionally, SHPA lists high-risk areas for street harassment, many of which include places of work for District employees. Therefore, many District employees may experience or witness street harassment while working, so it's important that policies and protocols are in place.