

[ADDRESS]

[DATE]

Dear [LEGISLATOR],

First and foremost, I would like to thank you on your leadership in New York City. As local activists who are committed to bringing an end to street harassment in our own communities, we are concerned with what is happening today on the streets of Brooklyn. *Hollaback!* uses technology, education, and advocacy to address street harassment and assault. Street harassment is any type of sexual harassment such as flashing, groping, or verbal harassment that occurs in a public space. With [nyc.iHollaback.org](http://nyc.iHollaback.org), residents of New York City can now upload photos, stories, and gps locations to document the epidemic that is street harassment.

### **The problem**

By listening to *Hollaback!* contributors in your neighborhood, we have learned that in NYC street harassment happens every hour. When harassment occurs, individuals must choose between ignoring it and feeling victimized or fighting it and risking personal safety. Those that attempt to report these crimes are frequently told there is nothing the authorities can do. These crimes are at epidemic proportions: 63% of all subway riders have been harassed and 10% have been assaulted according to a report by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. Worse still, the work of *Hollaback!* has demonstrated this issue is particularly significant for young people, who often shoulder the shame and embarrassment well into their adulthood. In a recent survey of the site's subscribers, we found that 85% of HollabackNYC's 100,000 unique monthly users are under the age of 30.

This story occurred in your district and was posted on the *Hollaback!NYC* website: "*At around 7:00 PM on Saturday night I was walking in the train station towards the turnstiles There is a hallway that leads up to a more open spot by the metro card machines and the turnstiles. Usually there are a few people around but on this particular occasion the hallway was empty. I was listening to my headphones so I didn't hear anyone come up behind me but as I was about halfway down the hallway someone grabbed me hard from behind, first by my shoulder and neck then on my upper right arm to kind of hold me in place. I was holding bags in both hands so had no real way to fight back other than to jerk around. As this man is holding me he put his hand up my dress and grabbed me.*

*Next thing I know he pushes me forward so I kind of stumble, I suppose to distract me while he ran away. The whole time I was screaming stop but no one was around. By the time I turned around all I could see was his back as he ran up the stairs back outside. The whole attack took about 30 very long seconds and unfortunately I never saw his face. All I could see was that he was tall and skinny with light brown hair long enough to be in a little ponytail and wearing a light colored t-shirt and what I think were khakis.*

*I have never felt like I couldn't handle myself, or even unsafe as I was walking home or taking the train home by myself at night. I like to think I am pretty aware of my surroundings but now the idea of walking home alone, or taking the train at night by myself actually makes me sick. I just wish I saw his face or that I was able to fight back harder. I'm still deciding whether or not to report it to the police, unfortunately I*

*have this fear that they aren't going to take me seriously and that is the last thing I need right now".*

Street harassment has long-term negative impacts ranging from self-blame to post-traumatic stress disorder. Street harassment also impedes equity: on iHollaback.org, survivors report changing jobs, turning down networking opportunities, and missing out on classes because they feel unsafe travelling alone to and from these activities.

### **The solution**

*Hollaback!* provides a safe forum for people to tell their stories using our blog, SMS texting, or our newly released iPhone and Droid app, and empowers local leaders to spearhead the movement in their own cities. Since May 2010, *Hollaback!* has launched 50 sites in 17 countries internationally, released a new website, iPhone, and Droid apps that provide a real-time response to street harassment, and inspired over 500 press hits including the New York Times, Daily News, and the New York Post.

In October 2010, *Hollaback!* testified at the first ever City Council hearing on street harassment and drew in a standing room only crowd. Advocates were consistent in their request for a city-wide study of street harassment, and this year, *Hollaback!* is working with the Cornell University International Labor Research Center to do an environmental scan of solutions to street harassment city-wide. Among service providers interviewed, preliminary results show that:

- 88% are fielding reports of street harassment from their clients;
- 93% want more resources on how to deal with it; and
- 14% want to expand their mission statement to address street harassment.

To capitalize on this promising surge of energy among service providers, *Hollaback!* will re-launch free iPhone and Droid apps next year that will allow residents to report their harassment and location to New York City, where it will be used to inform policy and bring awareness to the prevalence of this issue. The apps, combined with improved reporting systems, will make New York City the first city government in the world to track street harassment.

### **Next steps**

Street harassment is well poised to become the next big women's issue of the coming decade, in the same way that workplace harassment was in the 1980s. Cities around the world, including in England, Egypt, India, and Israel, are currently looking into policy solutions. Their challenge is similar to ours: without research and a clearly identified problem, many of these solutions will fall flat. By giving NYC residences a real time response to street harassment, and by engaging the communities most affected by street harassment, our success in New York City will be a model for cities around the world.

We would like to schedule a meeting at your convince to discuss how street harassment is directly impacting your constituents and their ability to be active members of their communities. We will call your office in the next week, but please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions, my number is [YOUR NUMBER] and my email is [YOUR EMAIL].

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

Co-founder and co-director of [HOLLABACK YOUR TOWN]