

Cam Holmstrom Response to Hollaback! Ottawa

Thank you Hollaback! for your questionnaire and for asking we candidates to reply directly to your questions. Here are my answers for you and if you need any further clarifications from me, please don't hesitate to ask.

1. Fund public service ads to raise awareness about harassment in public spaces

I agree with this request and I like the example given of what was done in Philadelphia. I believe that public-education campaigns like this can go a long way to creating a safer public environment for everyone in our city. The best thing that I like about this approach is that it is more pro-active, trying to educate people before they act.

2. Hire more OC Transpo special constables

I agree with having more help for citizens on OC Transpo but I also believe that we should start with the front-line staff that are already there to improve on the situation that currently exists. I agree that we do need better public safety protection on transit in our city, especially when we have the LRT up and running, but I would like to start with how we can improve public safety within the current staffing models.

If we find that we cannot make our transit safer without adding more special constables, then I would work with OC Transpo to hire more. In the end, if our public transit system is not seen as safe for users to use, then people will not use it. We have to ensure as best that we can that OC Transpo is the safe and convenient way to get around our city for everyone.

3. Prevent sexual assault at mass gatherings

The city does issue permits for all kinds of events, so it would be important to distinguish between the larger ones, like Bluesfest, and the smaller community events. Every event has its own capacities, so we would need to find solutions to fit those various situations. My preferred approach would be for the city to work with organizers of these events, to see what can be done within current structures to make mass gathers like theirs safer and more welcoming for all. I believe that most large events and community gatherings don't want incidences of sexual assault happening at their events, and will be very happy to work with the city to make their events that much safer.

4. Promote comprehensive sexual health

I completely agree with this request. As someone who has taught sexual education in schools, I have been happy to see the improvements in information given to youth about safe sex. I agree that can always be improved upon, especially to include more about what are healthy relationships, consent, and where they can get help when they are caught in bad situations.

5. Show commitment to making public transit safer for women & LGBTQ* folks

I agree with this approach that you are promoting and as I said earlier, if our public transit system is not seen as safe for users to use, then people will not use it. Given that my wife and daughter are frequent users of OC Transpo, I especially want to ensure that it is a safe environment for all users. One thing we can do is ensure that the Safe Stop program is better publicized, but also that staff are more open to allowing it to be used. I personally don't want to see any repeats of the stories we heard in the Spring about women being denied use of the program. There is no point in having a program if you don't let people use it. I believe that on these matters we can do better, and I commit to working to ensure that it is better.

In closing, I want to add that I'm proud that in my work as a staff person in the Federal NDP caucus that I have been a part of a team that as constantly stood up against all violence in our communities, but especially gender based violence. I'm especially proud as a Métis man and father of the work I was able to be a part of on one of the most important gender-violence issues in Canada; the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women across Canada. For over a year, I worked with my boss (MP Romeo Saganash) as a part of the NDP caucus staff in Parliament on the Special Committee on Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women. That experience is one that will never leave me; listening to the testimony, the families come forward to tell us the stories of their loved ones and to see the stone-faced government seemingly ignore it all to fit their agenda. Listening to the statistics and the situation that exists in small communities and big cities all across the country can only leave one to conclude that this problem exists for only one reason. As Mr. Saganash said in the House of Commons this month, it is because the victims were women and they were aboriginal. The stark reality is, even in our community, that Aboriginal women and girls are more than four times more likely to be victims, and that includes my two year old daughter. That continues to drive me as for my part, I want to ensure that by the time that my daughter reaches adulthood that those statistics are a thing of the past and that she is able to live in a city where gender-based violence is non-existent. I want to work with communities and groups like Hollaback! to ensure that we can see that day soon, and if elected, I want to be an ally on City Council.

Thank you again for reaching out and continuing to do the good work that you do.