

# SAFER STREETS IN OTTAWA

Despite advances in gender equality, street harassment remains a pressing issue in our society. Studies have shown that women are the primary victims of street harassment and of violence in public spaces. According to Hollaback! Ottawa, the local chapter of an organization dedicated to ending street harassment, in summer 2013, "97% of respondents had experienced at least one form of street harassment during the previous year and 44% had experienced at least one incident on public transit." I believe that it is imperative to address this issue if we want a safer Ottawa as I envision, given my experiences and knowledge on such an important issue.

As a Federal Civil Servant, I have dealt with extreme cases of gender-based violence overseas, specifically in the conflict situation of the Democratic Republic of Congo. While Ottawa is nowhere near such levels of violence, this does not excuse us for tolerating any type of street harassment. Thus, I fully support Hollaback! Ottawa's five priorities as discussed below:

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

The City already uses advertising in buses, for example, to encourage polite and respectful behaviour. In partnering with non-profit organizations, the City could help sponsor "impactful messaging about gender-based violence with a focus on prevention and in particular, bystander intervention." Different private groups have already advertised in this manner, and so a partnership with Ottawa Public Health and the Ottawa Police Service would be a positive development.

## 2. Hire more OC Transpo special constables

Having more constables would certainly benefit riders and operators. However, OC Transpo is concerned with the issue of not having the funds required for such a proposal. In the short-term, this is a funding need we have to examine. In the long-term, I believe that OC Transpo could explore revenues from its air rights. For example, it could let developers or business owners exploit or even construct facilities above the vast Park-and-ride stations it owns and charge them for using that space. So OC Transpo's Park-and-ride stations would be underground, which would raise revenues and, among other service improvements, enable the hiring of more special constables as suggested by Hollaback! Ottawa.

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## 3. Prevent sexual assault at mass gatherings

The City of Ottawa has experienced an increase in reported sexual assaults at mass gatherings and it is true that because the City is responsible for granting permits for these events, it could require that event staff be trained in preventing and responding to sexual violence, perhaps a patrol team of sorts, to ensure safety and report incidents.

## 4. Promote comprehensive sexual health

Definitely! Awareness of street violence has links with the promotion of sexual health. There needs to be a program that helps people to understand how to draw the line between a simple conversation or relationship as opposed to an harassment and how to deal with such situations. To do so, I would support Ottawa Public Health partnerships with school boards, post-secondary institutions and community health centers. Such programs can coach people, especially teenagers and students, about healthy sexual relationships and about preventing harassment.

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

Since Ottawa's safety is among the main points on my platform, I am very committed to making public transit safer for every citizen. In addition to my above points, the designs of the new train stations have to have safety as the top priority. There should be an audit of all bus stops to determine their levels of lighting at night and then a comprehensive plan to phase in lightposts where required.

I have a larger objective for the City to promote better street safety by improving lighting on sidewalks, parks. In the long term, I want to the City to embrace the "Complete Streets" approach for all roads, to make our communities "neighborhood and pedestrian friendly" for all.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Hollaback! Ottawa for its great initiative in making the City a better place. Thank you for ensuring that gender-based violence is a priority for the upcoming municipal election and for reaching out to your candidates.

For more information, see: Hollaback! Ottawa at <http://ottawa.ihollaback.org/>

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