

Harassment **Toward** Vulnerable Road Users **in** Kansas City



A report by BikeWalkKC

BikeWalkKC is the unified voice for active living, promoting a healthy, safe & accessible outdoor experience for all in a vibrant, engaged community.

BikeWalkKC.org



Introduction

Ensuring safe streets means ending street harassment.

Many pedestrians are **experiencing harassment** on American streets, and it's **hindering their right** to a **safe trip**.

BikeWalkKC's efforts to pass an anti-harassment ordinance in Kansas City stem from the **nationwide biking and walking movement**. BikeWalkKC helps build bike lanes and sidewalks. We educate and empower people about the importance of safe biking and walking. We need to **ensure people feel safe on our streets**.

During the KC Women's Summit last spring, the issue of street harassment was brought to our attention, and we heard countless stories illustrating how serious an issue street harassment is in Kansas City. Street harassment is a **mobility issue** that needs to be addressed.

A 2014 study by nonprofit Stop Street Harassment shows **65%** of American women having been the **victim of harassment**. Those numbers are in reality, much higher, as many cases of harassment go unreported. BikeWalkKC conducted its own survey and **found 82% had experienced harassment while walking** and **75% had experienced harassment while biking**.

Street harassment **keeps many people from feeling safe** in public spaces. **Vulnerable road users**--pedestrians, cyclists, people in wheel chairs--are the most common targets of harassment, ranging from a physical attack to a verbal assault.

Any woman or man who has experienced street harassment knows that it can be anything from disturbing to traumatic -- to the point where it can **persuade an individual to stow their bike away** in the garage, **pack those running shoes in the closet**, and **grab the car keys** instead. And for those **who don't have that option**, they **live with the discomfort** of being on the streets.

All Kansas Citians have the right to travel and access to work without fear or uneasiness.

As Kansas City works to make its streets safe for walking, cycling, and other modes of transportation, **tighter laws and education will be as important** as new sidewalks or bike lanes.

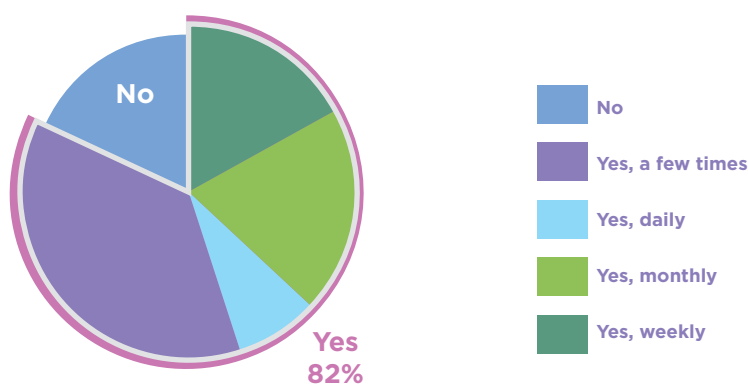
BikeWalkKC hopes to pass an ordinance that **defines and prohibits streets harassment**. Following you will find survey results and letters of support in favor of an anti-harassment ordinance.

Survey Results

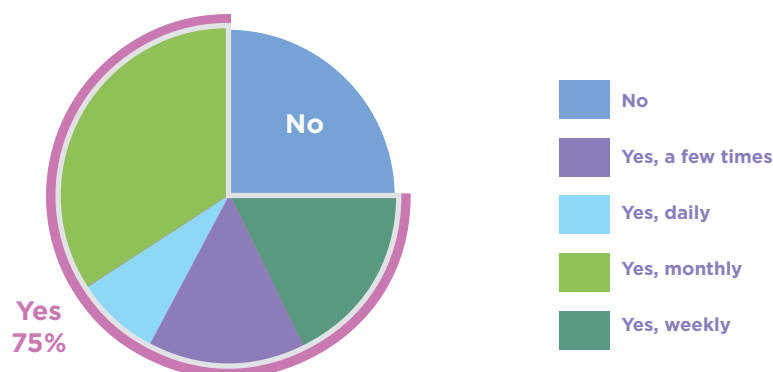
In September 2014, BikeWalkKC conducted a survey about street harassment in Kansas City, asking people to **identify incidences of street harassment** in their lives and how that has **affected their behavior and attitudes towards walking, biking, and using Kansas City's streets.**

Harassment Incidences

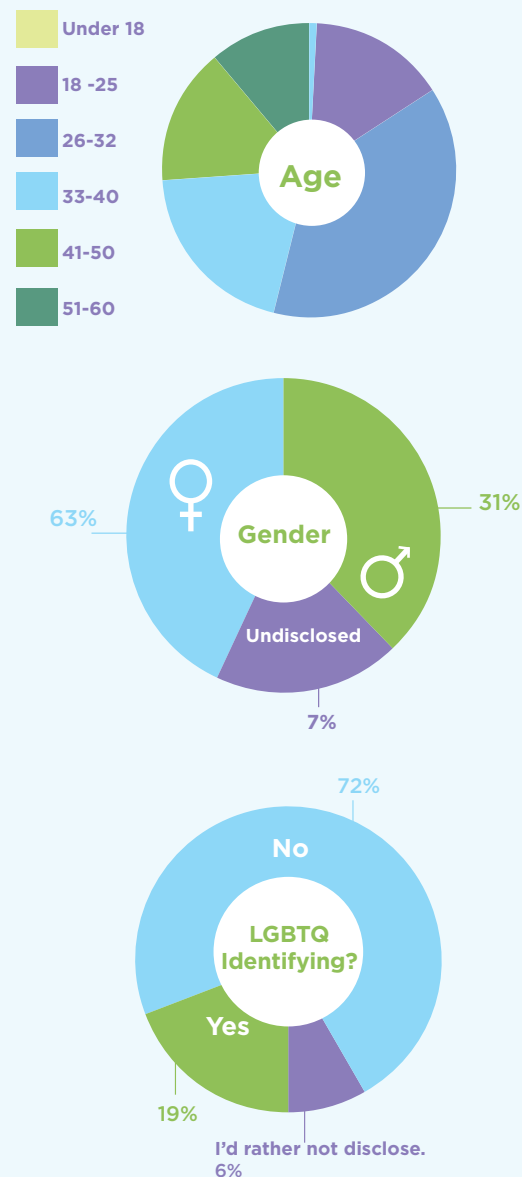
Have you ever been harassed (such as verbal comments, honking, whistling, kissing noises, leering/staring, groping, stalking, attempted or achieved assault, etc) while walking?



Have you ever been harassed (such as verbal comments, honking, whistling, kissing noises, leering/staring, groping, stalking, attempted or achieved assault, etc) while biking?



Demographics



Nationwide findings

A 2014 study by nonprofit Stop Street Harassment shows 65% of American women having been the victim of harassment, while just a quarter of men have experienced it. 86% percent of women and 79% of men who reported being harassed said they had been harassed more than once. Around 50% of harassed women and men experienced street harassment by age 17.

According to a report by the Center for American Progress, LGBT individuals report high rates of discrimination in public spaces.

"I was complaining about street harassment to my co-worker one morning, and she **told me to walk a different way to work.** But I don't, I go the same way, the way that is easiest for me, because I **don't feel like I should have to change myself** to avoid this kind of behavior."

Survey Results

Online Petition Support

BikeWalkKC also conducted a petition online for individuals to pledge their support for an anti-harassment ordinance. We received more than 200 signatures of support in less than four weeks.

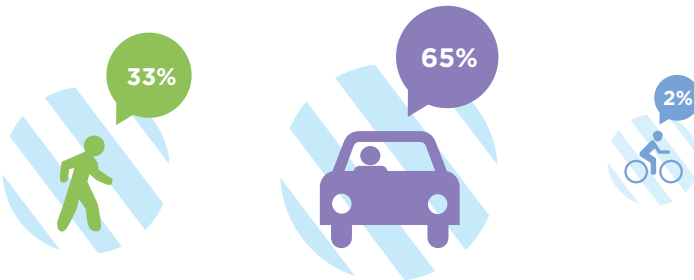
"People shouldn't need to be afraid like this."

"I used to live at the corner of 39th and Gillham. Over the course of three and a half years living there, I **experienced sexual and other harassment on average 3 times a week.**

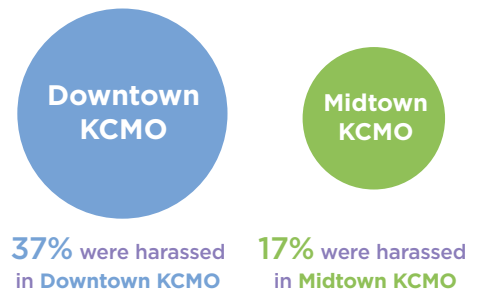
I shouldn't have had to have been so nervous to walk down my own street in the middle of the day. But I was. Every day.

People shouldn't need to be afraid like this. Please do something."

If you have experienced harassment, who has been the most frequent source of harassment?



Where does harassment occur?
Most common locations

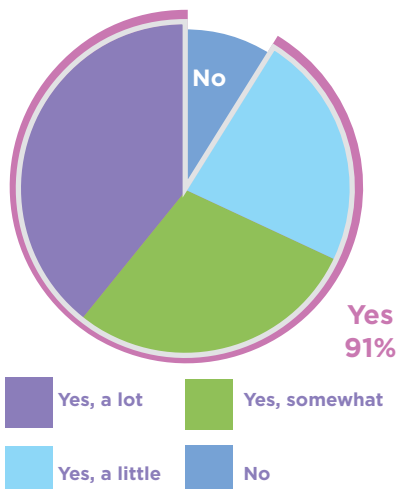


"My most severe case of harassment occurred while running. **I had a car pull up and ask me if I wanted a ride.** I ignored them and they drove off, but then I continued to see their car at several places along my route. When I saw another pedestrian I asked to use their phone and called the cops, and **I changed my running route.**"

*Other noted, but less common, locations include **KCK; Brookside and Waldo, country roads and suburban streets.***

Impact of Street Harassment

Has harassment affected how safe you feel on the street?



Only 17% say bystanders have ever intervened or said something.



2/3

Said street harassment is a barrier to riding a bike or walking



>50%

Said street harassment is a barrier to riding the bus

"I experience street harassment very frequently. I walk to and from work down W. 39th St. every day.

The honking is terrible because it startles me and I worry I may fall into the street."

Educational workshops

Almost all respondents said they would **benefit from an educational workshop** addressing topics such as **rights and protections, how to respond to harassment, strategies for intervening**, and how to be an **advocate** for safer streets.

Letters of Support

This is a sampling of **letters of support** we have received in **favor of passing an anti-harassment ordinance**.



September 19, 2014

Kansas City, City Hall
414 E. 12th Street,
Kansas City, Missouri 64106.

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for people walking and other vulnerable road users. Mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work, and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

Providing safe and comfortable communities for walking is critical to ensuring that people have equal access to everyday transportation. People across the nation want neighborhoods free to all types of violence and nuisance, and this type of anti-harassment bill will make a difference.

America Walks supports an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Bricker".

Scott Bricker
Executive Director

Letters of Support

VANCE C. PREMAN

Attorney at Law
A Professional Corporation
Licensed in Missouri & Kansas
Toll Free: 1-800-245-8731
www.vpremanlaw.com

Missouri Office ☒

Mailing Address:
4330 Belleview, Suite 200
Kansas City, MO 64111
Telephone: (816) 756-2323
Fax: (816) 756-3389

☐ Kansas Office

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 23533
Shawnee Mission, KS 66283
VPREMANLAW@aol.com

September 16, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members:

As a taxpayer, lawyer, father and cyclist, I support the anti-harassment ordinance.

Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work, and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action," street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

I am also a member of Bikelaw.com, a nationwide network of lawyers. Our group supports this endeavor. Let's make our livable" City even more "livable" by passing the ordinance.

Sincerely,
VANCE C. PREMAN, P.C.


Vance C. Preman

VCP;j

Letters of Support



September 17, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work, and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

I support an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gloria Fisher", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Gloria Fisher
Executive Director of Westside Housing Organization

Letters of Support



September 2, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

Street harassment is a serious problem globally, nationally and in Kansas City. In particular, it affects pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users, including teenagers and college students traveling to and from school by bus, foot, wheelchair, or bicycle.

My nonprofit organization Stop Street Harassment recently worked with survey firm GfK to conduct a [nationally representative survey](#) in the United States. Two-thirds of women and one-fourth of men had experienced unwanted verbal and physical harassment in public spaces. Half of all harassed persons were harassed by age 17. Most women experienced multiple instances of harassment and said it negatively impacted their lives, gay and bisexual men were similarly affected.

As awareness grows about street harassment, a number of cities in the United States are recognizing it as a serious problem. City council hearings, public service announcement (PSA) campaigns, training police officers and transit officers, and anti-harassment ordinances are some of their approaches.

Kansas City has a chance to be among the leading cities addressing this problem. I support the current efforts underway to pass an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment.

From my organization's toolkit, [Know Your Rights: Street Harassment and the Law](#) I know that in Missouri, there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", and while some street harassment behaviors may be qualify, most forms are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment that can negatively impact the recipient – especially young women -- sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone and I believe this ordinance can be an important step in that direction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Holly Kearn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

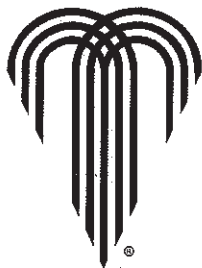
Holly Kearn

Founder, Stop Street Harassment

Author, *Stop Street Harassment: Making Public Places Safe and Welcoming for Women*

Consultant, UN Women's Safe Cities Global Initiative

Letters of Support



KANSAS CITY
MISSOURI

Health Department

2400 Troost Avenue, Suite 4000
Kansas City, Missouri 64108
Office (816) 513-6252 Fax (816) 513-6293

Director's Office



Public Health

September 18, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work, and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

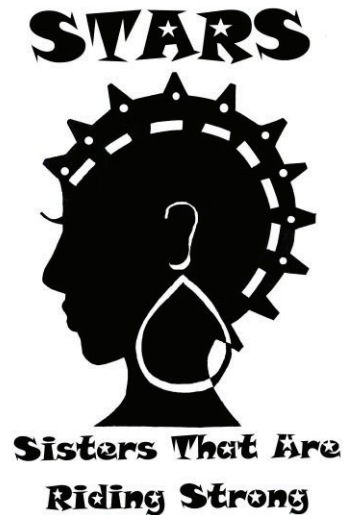
Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

I support an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

Sincerely,

Rex Archer, M.D., M.P.H.
Director

Letters of Support



<http://starskc.wix.com/starscycling>

Dear Mayor Sly James,

We support an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

As a predominately African-American Cycling Club we are an anomaly and get a lot of reaction from the public, most of which is positive, however; on those occasions when the response is inappropriate it can be very intimidating. It is difficult to determine where the line will be drawn with someone who is already out of bounds.

You have already made such a tremendous difference to Kansas Citians since you took office and for that we are grateful. Your dedication to correcting city issues gives us hope that this ordinance will be put in place and the experience we have as we use our streets will be improved.

Cordially,

Kim Cole/
Vice President
816.304.3149

Letters of Support



820 W 17th Street Kansas City, MO 64108

August 29, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work, and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

Pique Co. is a small-business consulting firm located in the Crossroads Art District, which offers long-term sustainability solutions for business owners and no-profit organizations. Through collaborative relationships with our clients, we are able to build unique and tailored solutions. Many of us work and live in the metro area, giving us a great opportunity to walk or bike to the corner store or local restaurants. Thus, we support an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

Sincerely,

Kate DeWalt, Tess Pattison Wade, & Andrea Wescott
Pique Co. Founders

Letters of Support

DATE: 9/22/2014

TO: Mayor James and City Council Members

FROM: Eric Rogers, Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

RE: Ordinance 140777, Anti-Harassment

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) is a Council-appointed body charged with advising the City on strategies and policies for making Kansas City more bike-friendly and pedestrian-friendly.

BPAC has long heard from the public that street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work, and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

On September 22nd, 2014 the BPAC voted unanimously to endorse Ordinance 140777 and urge the Council to adopt it as drafted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric D. Rogers" followed by a stylized flourish.

Eric Rogers

Letters of Support



September 23, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

Almost every runner I know, including myself, has experienced street harassment at least once in their running experiences. I know runners and bikers who have been run off the road because a car came so close to them, cars have swerved at them on purpose, had drinks or objects thrown on them, have been yelled at from a passing car to startle them. I always wonder if the vehicle driver will feel better if someone is killed or injured. Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for runners, pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Runners (who happen to be in compliance with traffic laws), mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

I support an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

Best Regards,

Nancy English
President, Kansas City Track Club
kctcrunner@gmail.com

Letters of Support



MainCor & MSCID

Main Street Corridor Development Corporation
Main Street Community Improvement District

3215 Main Street, Suite 200
Kansas City, MO 64111
(816) 753-3820
www.mainstreetkansascity.org

September 23, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

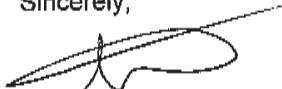
Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Families walking with children to school, cyclists biking to work and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods and it's time for a change.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment. A person should be able to walk or ride a bicycle to the store without such interruptions along the way.

We support an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces—streets, neighborhoods and bus stops—are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

We need to start caring about all people in a kind and safe manner!

Sincerely,



Diane Burnette
Executive Director

Letters of Support

5804 Wyandotte Street
Kansas City, MO
September 23, 2014

Public Safety & Emergency Services Committee
John A. Sharp, Chair
Jermaine Reed, Vice Chair
Michael E. Brooks, Member
Scott Taylor, Member

Dear Chairperson Sharp and Committee Members,

I am unable to be personally present at your meeting on September 24, 2014, so I am submitting my remarks in written form. This is pursuant to 140777 Amending Chapter 50, Article VI, Offenses Against Public Safety, by enacting a new Section 50 – 205.....

I am a retired educator and I live at 5804 Wyandotte Street in the Fourth District. I frequently ride my bicycle for transportation here in the city and all over the metropolitan area. I support the amendment above to prohibit various kinds of harassment that many cyclists experience as they travel through the city.

On two occasions I have had men get out of their automobiles at red lights and walk back and shout at me about being on the road while riding a bicycle. In both instances they told me that I should be on the sidewalk. Both men were visibly angry, raised their voices, and treated me as if I have no right to be on the road. In one case, I was actually with a second, female, cyclist.

I have also had a person in a car make a blood curdling scream just as the car passed me. Of course this frightened me, but fortunately I did not lose control of my bike.

I hope that your effort to legally prohibit such actions will make the roads safer and friendlier for pedestrians, wheelchair operators and cyclists, and I thank you for your efforts on our behalf.

Sincerely yours,

Caroline J. Helmkamp

Letters of Support

Family Bicycles

7337 Broadway
Kansas City, MO 64114
816-268-1757
www.familybicycles-kc.com

September 18, 2014

Dear Mayor Sly James and City Council Members,

Street harassment is a serious problem in Kansas City for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Mothers walking children to school, cyclists biking to work, and individuals waiting at the bus stop are just a few examples of the countless people who have become targets on our streets and in our neighborhoods, and it's time for a change.

Every day I hear customers complain that they would ride more if they felt safer, safer from aggressive vehicle traffic and from people yelling at them to get on the sidewalk. People want to be outside and be more active and feel a part of their community. Riding bicycles and walking in the neighborhood leads to many other benefits. Neighbors know each other, look out for each other and form a deeper sense of belonging and caring about where they live.

Although there are existing laws that ban behavior like using "coarse language" or committing a "threatening, intimidating, or alarming action", street harassment behaviors are rarely explicitly prohibited. That lack of specificity means that something like a suggestive comment, sadly, is often not legally recognized as harassment.

I support an anti-harassment ordinance that would define and prohibit street harassment. I want to make sure that all of Kansas City's public spaces--streets, neighborhoods, and bus stops--are safe for everyone. With this ordinance, we can help make this happen.

Sincerely,



Theresa M. Van Ackeren
Managing Director

