Good morning Councilmember Bowser and members of the committee.

Thank you for holding this hearing. My name is Karen Starr, and I am a recent new resident of Ward 5. Prior to August, I lived in Columbia Heights in Ward 1. I would like to testify today about an incident of sexual harassment that occurred in October of 2009 on Metro’s Green Line.

It was a Saturday night, my friend’s birthday, and we had been bar-hopping. After the first three bars, I got a little tired and a little drunk and took the metro home from Dupont Circle to Columbia Heights alone, around midnight.

After I’d switched trains at Gallery Place, I leaned back and dozed, being the only one in the car. I woke up just as the train left U-Street, because a man’s voice was saying something. I opened my eyes and saw him: he was sitting in the handicapped seats, just two seats away from me, muttering, “Oh, pretty baby, sweetie, honey, you so hot…,” with one hand down his sweatpants, staring directly at me.

I was so surprised to see him that at first I wasn’t even angry. I just stared at him. He realized I was awake and looking at him, and he slowly took his hand out of his pants and smiled at me. I frowned and continued to stare at him. He looked away. I said nothing, but I stared at him all the way from U-Street to Columbia Heights, which is about a five minute ride, some of the most uncomfortable five minutes of my life. Every now and then he’d sneak a glance at me, confirm I was still staring, smile (leer), and look away again. When Columbia Heights was announced, I stood up and walked to the doors. Immediately, I heard him begin muttering his weird little mantra again, “Sweetie, pretty baby, etc.”

I did not turn and confront him, but raised the middle finger of my right hand. He didn’t stop his muttering. As the doors opened, I turned around and waved my finger in his face, saying, “You see this? This is for you.” I didn’t want him to be unclear about either my anger or my disdain. Then I left the train.

I considered, as I stood on the platform, whether I should call 911 or not, and decided against it, reasoning that he would have left the train long before any metro cop was able to respond. I walked up the escalators and saw, unsurprisingly, that there was no one in the attendants’ box (not a rare occurrence late-night in Columbia Heights.) If this man had been more confrontational or had tried to touch me or follow me off the train, I do not know how I would have handled it. I do know that I would have had no immediate assistance from Metro personnel in the station, as there weren’t any.

This incident, and a few others like it, have shaped how I approach travel in the District and on the Metro late at night, especially on the weekends. If I cannot find a companion to ride the metro or bus with me, I will take a cab or often I simply won’t go.