

Good Afternoon Council Member Bowser, Members of the Committee and Committee Staff,

My name is Pascale Leone and I would like to present testimony on the very important issue of public sexual harassment on DC Metro trains and buses. I found out about today's hearing from Collective Action for Safe Spaces through the Washington DC Women's Information Network.

I stand before you as a self-proclaimed "city girl", one who has taken subways, metros and buses at all hours of the night for over 20 years – the last six years here in Washington DC. I also stand before you as a witness and victim of sexual assault and harassment. I felt it my duty to speak before you today and share my story in the hopes that it would help cultivate action.

One sunny August evening in 2008 I was leaving the office a little after 5pm. I was heading north on L Street to turn into the Farragut North metro station on Connecticut Avenue and L Street to go home. Upon entering the metro, I took notice of a young male in a white T-shirt. He was unremarkable except for the fact that it was rush-hour and I was used to seeing folks in work clothes around that time. All of a sudden, when he should've walked past me, he instead made a direct bee-line towards me. I was in a state of shock. All my years of taking public transportation I feared one day this would happen to me, but I always thought I'd be prepared. I wasn't. In a flash, the young male in the white T-shirt came onto me saying derogatory things about my body and proceeded to – in what felt like the longest seconds of my life – fondle my chest and buttocks unremittingly and then walked away as if nothing had happened. My shock wore off and anger quickly set in. I was pissed. I turned around with clenched fists and caught my assailant's vacant eyes as he muttered, "You f---ing b-tch" and calmly turned around and continued to walk away. My gut told me, "Pascale, don't mess with him. Go get help." Unfortunately, this is the part of the story that is most troubling for me.

I walked up to the metro attendant who was speaking with a woman and her toddler-aged daughter. He saw how frantic I was and asked if I was OK. I responded, "No, I was just groped right outside of the metro by a male in a white T-shirt with locks." "Oh him," he responded casually adding "he just grabbed that girl's butt" pointing at a woman going up the escalators. He proceeded to chuckle about it. What's worse, so did the woman with the small child. I stood there, embarrassed and in disbelief. I did not expect such lack of compassion from the Metro worker. I continued to stand there as I looked at both the Metro attendant and the mother who both looked at me with confused expressions – confused as to why I was so shaken up but something so trivial. Fortunately in those moments of awkward silence, I saw two Metro transit officers run past me and heard the following from their two-way radio: "black male, white T-shirt." I turned and walked away saying nothing more to the Metro attendant who didn't bother to follow-up with me either. The next day this incident was in the DCist and the Examiner. I read that minutes before my assault, the male in the white T-shirt had punched a woman in the back of her head and after me, he grabbed a woman on K Street and tried to rape her until a group of passerby's heard her scream and held the suspect until the police arrived. I also read

sometime later that the assailant was high off of some illicit substances during the time of his arrest.

What was most disturbing about this story was not just the fact that it happened, but the total disregard shown to me by the Metro attendant; the person whose job it is to take reports of assault seriously. Since my assault, I have been witness to other forms of harassment including a man taking pictures of a woman's chest on the metro.

I hope my testimony and the testimony of others today has helped to shed some light and additional perspective on the harm sexual harassment causes. I firmly believe that there are simple steps that can be taken now to help curb the instances of sexual harassment, and to make the Metro a safe place to report such unfortunate instances. Simple steps including dedicating a hotline to report sexual harassment and the development of an awareness campaign informing Metro riders of what to do if they have been harassed or witnessed harassment. We cannot prevent all instances of sexual harassment, but there are simple common-sense action steps Metro can take to build a safe environment where such acts aren't tolerated.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.