

Stop Street Harassment

North Carolina

A variety of forms of street harassment are illegal in North Carolina, including verbal harassment, up-skirt photos, indecent exposure, following, and groping. Here are the laws and reporting procedures you need to know.

Verbal Harassment

In North Carolina, there are three laws that prohibit some form of verbal street harassment.

Disorderly Conduct

[N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-288.4](#)

North Carolina's disorderly conduct law states that it is illegal to make or use any utterance, gesture, display or abusive language that is intended to and likely to provoke violent retaliation.

This is what is known as a "[fighting words](#)" law. Since street harassment rarely results in the harassed person fighting back, these laws usually have not been used to address street harassment.

If a harasser says something particularly offensive or provoking, you can still try using this law, and if enough people make a case for why it should be used, then it might be applied more often.

Penalty: Disorderly conduct is a Class 2 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both.

Intoxicated and Disruptive in Public

[N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-444](#)

Being drunk and disruptive in public in North Carolina by blocking people's way on sidewalks or into a building, cursing or rudely insulting others, or grabbing or shoving people is illegal.

If a street harasser is clearly drunk and doing any of these things to you or someone else, you can report him/her.

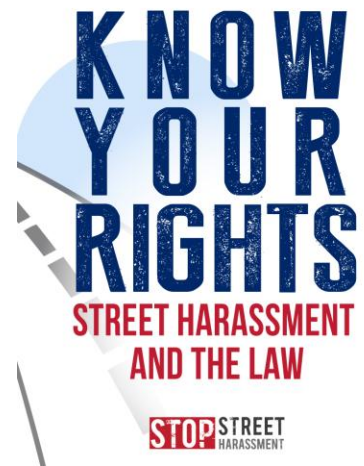
Penalty: Intoxicated and disruptive in public is a Class 3 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 10 days in jail, up to \$200, or both.

Using Profane or Indecent Language on Public Highways

[N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-197](#)

It is illegal in North Carolina for anyone, in the hearing of at least two people, to use indecent or profane language while on any public road or highway. (This law does not state it explicitly, but we assume it includes sidewalks).

If a harasser is loudly using sexual language or profanity (such as, "You f---ing bitch" and "Go to hell, fags") and at least one other person besides you hears the harasser, you can report him or her under this law.



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Penalty: Using profane or indecent language is a Class 3 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 10 days in jail, up to \$200, or both.

Unlawful Photographing

Secretly Peeping into Room Occupied by Another Person

[N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-202](#)

In North Carolina, it is illegal for anyone to intentionally photograph a non-consenting person through or underneath his/her clothing for the purpose of viewing that person's body or underwear.

If a harasser photographs you someplace like public restrooms, dressing rooms, locker rooms, and hotel rooms, or if someone takes an up-skirt photo of you or takes photographs of your breasts, butt, and genitals or your underwear without your consent, you can report that person.

Penalty: Unlawful photographing is a Class 1 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 45 days in jail and/or a fine made at the discretion of the court.

Indecent Exposure

Indecent Exposure

[N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-190.9](#)

It is illegal in North Carolina for a person to intentionally expose his or her private parts in any public place when others are present.

If a harasser flashes or otherwise exposes him or herself to you in a public place, such as a park, on public transportation, or in a store, you can report that person.

Penalty: Indecent exposure is a Class 2 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in jail, a fine of up to \$1,000, or both.

Following

If you think someone is following you, you can call 911 right away, the first time it happens. You do not have to wait for that person to commit a crime.

Stalking

[N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-277.3A](#)

A person can be convicted of stalking in North Carolina if, on more than one occasion, s/he engages in conduct directed at another person with the intent to place or when s/he knows or reasonably should know that the conduct places that other person in reasonable fear of personal safety or causes that person substantial emotional distress by making that person fear death, injury, or continued harassment.

If the same person, on more than one occasion, follows you or harasses you and you feel threatened and unsafe, you can report that person.

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Penalty: Stalking is a Class A1 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 60 days in jail and/or a fine made at the discretion of the courts. The penalty increases for repeat offenders.

Groping

Sexual Battery

[N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-27.5A](#)

It is illegal for anyone to have sexual contact with another person by force and without the consent of that person, for the purpose of sexual arousal, sexual gratification, or sexual abuse.

If anyone touches you in a sexual way against your will in a public place like the street, bus stop, or in a bar, you can report that person.

Penalty: Sexual battery is a Class A1 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 60 days in jail and/or a fine made at the discretion of the courts. The penalty increases for repeat offenders.

Reporting Crimes to the Police

- Call 911 for help if:
 - The crime is in progress
 - You or someone else is physically hurt or have been threatened with physical violence
 - You can provide information about who may have committed a crime.

- Call the local police office's non-emergency number to submit a report afterward. For example, in Raleigh, it is 919-996-3335 and in Charlotte, it's 311 if you're within city limits. In Asheville, it's (828) 252-1110. Be prepared to provide them with:
 - When it happened (date and time).
 - Where it happened (street location, store location, bus line or bus stop, park name, etc).
 - Who is reporting (your name, contact information, date of birth).
 - A description of what happened.
 - The name and contact information of witnesses, if you spoke to any.
 - It can be helpful to include the law the crime falls under, such as sexual battery, [N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-27.5A](#). If you're not sure which law you should use to report an incident of street harassment, just tell the police what happened and s/he or the district attorney's office can determine the appropriate charges.
 - A description of the harasser/s.

- Many police departments also have online reporting forms.
 - [Raleigh](#) has an online webform that allows you to report crimes like harassing phone calls.
 - [Charlotte](#) has an online reporting form that allows to you report crimes like communicating threats.

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- Some police departments also allow you to anonymously text a tip about a crime, for example if you see a group of people routinely harassing passersby at the same location. Visit your local police department website for information.
 - Raleigh allows you to submit a tip anonymously by calling 919-834-HELP (4357).
 - In Asheville, you can call 828.255.5050 or text the number 274637 (CRIMES) and begin the message with “APDTIP”.
 - [TipSubmit](#) is also available to over 20 counties in North Carolina.
- Once you’ve reported a crime, if you’ve provided your contact information, within a few days, you will receive a call with a police report case number and may have to answer follow-up questions. Save a copy of the police report for your records.

If someone tries to tell you that street harassment “isn’t a big deal,” or isn’t illegal, don’t buy it. You always have the right to be free from sexual harassment and assault in public.