

Stop Street Harassment

Ohio

A variety of forms of street harassment are illegal in Ohio, including verbal harassment, indecent exposure, following, and groping. Here are the laws and reporting procedures you need to know.

Verbal Harassment

There are two laws that prohibit some forms of verbal harassment in Ohio. There is a law against harassment in Ohio (§2917.21), but it only applies to harassment by phone.

Compelling Prostitution

[Title 29, Chapter 2907 § 21](#)

It is illegal in Ohio for anyone to solicit, request, or otherwise facilitate or pay a minor – or someone one believed to be a minor – to engage in sexual activity. You can also make the case that harassers who yell, “How much?!” or offer you money, or anything else, for sex, even in jest, are soliciting prostitution.

If someone solicits you to engage in sexual activity and you are a minor, or this happens to a young person you care for, you can report the harasser.

Stop Street Harassment doesn't oppose consensual sex work, but we do think it's inappropriate for a street harasser to make assumptions about your sexual availability and make you feel uncomfortable.

Penalty: Compelling prostitution is a felony of the third degree, punishable by a prison term of between nine months and three years.

Disorderly Conduct

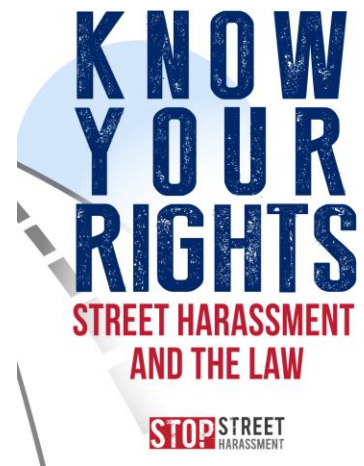
[Title 29, Chapter 2917 § 11](#)

Ohio's disorderly conduct law prohibits people from:

- Making unreasonable noise.
- Making an offensively course utterance or gesture.
- Insulting or taunting someone under circumstances likely to provoke a violent response.
- Preventing someone from moving along a public street or from entering/leaving a public or private property.

If a harasser is using sexually explicit or other offensive language, taunting you, shouting loudly at you, or stops you from using the sidewalk or entering a store or another public place, you can report him/her.

The prohibition of language likely to provoke a violent response 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. But you can still try using it, and if enough people make a case for why it should be used, then it might be applied more often.



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Penalty: Disorderly conduct is a minor misdemeanor, punishable by a fine. If the offense is committed near a school or in a school safety zone, it is a misdemeanor in the fourth degree, punishable by up to 30 days in jail.

Unlawful Filming/Photographing

Voyeurism

[Title 29, Chapter 2907 § 8](#)

In Ohio, it is illegal for a person to photograph or record a non-consenting person:

- While that person is naked and with the purpose of sexual arousal.

If a harasser films or photographs you someplace like public restrooms, dressing rooms, locker rooms, and hotel rooms, you can report him/her.
- Under or through his/her clothing for the purpose of viewing that person's body or underwear.

If a street harasser takes an up-skirt or down-blouse photo of you, or otherwise observes or photographs you in an inappropriate way, you can report him/her.

Penalty: Taking photos or recording someone naked is a misdemeanor in the second degree, punishable by up to 90 days in prison. If the person is a minor, it is a felony in the fifth degree, punishable by between six and 12 months. If someone takes a photo under or through someone's clothing, that is a misdemeanor in the first degree, punishable by up to 180 days in prison.

Indecent Exposure

Indecent Exposure

[Title 29, Section 2907 § 9](#)

In Ohio it is illegal for anyone to:

- Recklessly expose his or her private parts.
- Engage in sexual conduct.
- Masturbate.
- Engage in conduct that would appear to be masturbation or sexual conduct to an ordinary observer under circumstances in which the person's conduct is likely to be viewed by and to affront others in the person's physical proximity.

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

Penalty: Flashing or exposure is a misdemeanor of the fourth degree, punishable by up to 30 days in jail. Masturbation and other sexual conduct in public is a misdemeanor in the third degree, punishable by up to 60 days in prison.

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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.

Menacing by Stalking

Title 29, Section 2903 § 211

Under Ohio's stalking law, it is illegal for anyone to engage in a pattern of conduct that causes another person to believe the harasser will cause him or her physical harm or mental distress.

If the same person follows or harasses you at least twice and those actions make you fearful or distressed, you can report that person under this law.

Penalty: Menacing by stalking is a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable by up to 180 days in prison. It can rise to a more serious crime if the person being stalked is a minor or if the harasser is a repeat offender or has a history of violence against the person s/he is stalking.

Groping

Sexual Imposition

Title 29, Section 2907 § 6

It is illegal for anyone to have sexual contact with another person if s/he knows that the sexual contact is offensive to that person or if that person is unable to give consent or to realize what is happening.

Sexual contact is defined in Ohio as touching the thigh, genitals, buttock, pubic region, or, if the person is a female, a breast, for the purpose of sexually arousing or gratifying either person.

If a harasser touches or grabs you or rubs against you on an intimate or private part of your body without your consent, be it at a bar, on the bus, or on the street, you can report him/her.

Penalty: Sexual imposition is a misdemeanor of the third degree, punishable by up to 60 days in prison.

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.
 - In Dayton, it is (937) 333-COPS (2677).
 - In Cincinnati, it is 513-765-1212.
 - In Cleveland, it is 216-621-1234.
 - In Columbus, it is 614-645-4545.

Be prepared to provide them with:

- When it happened (date and time).

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- Where it happened (street location, store location, bus line or bus stop, park name, etc).
 - Who is reporting (your name and contact information).
 - 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 imposition. 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. Visit your local police department for information.
 - Some police departments also allow you to anonymously send a tip about a non-emergency incident, for example if you see a group of people routinely harassing passersby at the same location.
 - In Central Ohio, you can submit a tip by calling (614) 461-8477 or 1-877-645-8477, texting "CMH PLUS YOUR TIP" to the number 274637 (CRIMES), or via [webform](#).
 - In the Miami Valley area, you can do this by calling (937) 222-STOP or 1-800-637-5735, texting the word "TIP400" followed by your message to CRIMES (274637), or via [webform](#).
 - 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.