

Stop Street Harassment

Rhode Island

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

Verbal Harassment

There are four laws that can apply to various types of verbal harassment in Rhode Island.

Disorderly Conduct

[Title 11, Chapter 45, §1](#)

It is illegal for a person to:

- Intentionally make loud and unreasonable noise in a public place or near a private residence which would reasonably disturb an average person.

If a harasser is shouting and otherwise making loud noises in a public space, you can report him or her under this law.

- Block a street, sidewalk, stairway, building entrance, or other places that the public should have access to for no legitimate purpose.

If a harasser or group of harassers is stopping you from using the sidewalk or entering a store because s/he are harassing passersby, or s/he have harassed you there before, you can report him, her, or them.

- Spy on someone else through a window in a private place or to spy on someone in a restroom, locker room, changing room, dressing room, or other place where someone should have privacy.

If this happens to you, you can report the harasser for disorderly conduct.

Penalty: Disorderly conduct is punishable by a fine of up to \$500 and/or up to 6 months in jail.

Disorderly Conduct - Profanity

[Title 11, Chapter 11, §5](#)

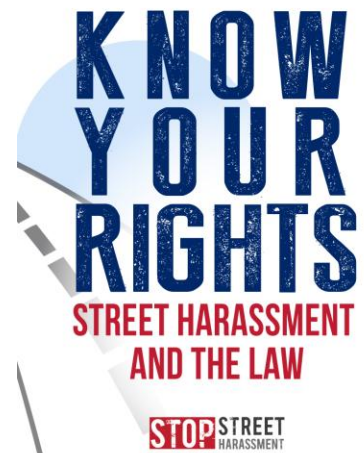
In Rhode Island, profane swearing and cursing is illegal, so if a harasser is swearing at you as part of the harassment, you can report him/her.

Penalty: Disorderly conduct – profanity is punishable by a fine of up to \$5.

Loitering

[Title 11, Chapter 34, §11](#)

It is illegal for someone to loiter on or around school grounds (elementary, vocational, or secondary school) and attempt to engage someone in prostitution or other “indecent acts,” especially if s/he intends to carry out the action on or within 300 yards of school grounds.



Stop Street Harassment

If a street harasser is soliciting sexual activity at or near a school, you can report him or her for loitering.

Stop Street Harassment doesn't oppose consensual sex work, but we do think it's never okay to solicit and harass underage youth by their school!

Penalty: Loitering for indecent purposes in or near schools is punishable by a fine of between \$500 and \$1,000 and/or up to 1 year in jail.

Soliciting from Motor Vehicle for Indecent Purposes

[Title 11, Chapter 34.1, §6](#)

If a person in a motor vehicle tries to solicit you for sex or a sex act, while you're on foot or in another vehicle, you can report that person.

Penalty: Soliciting from a motor vehicle for indecent purposes is punishable by a fine up between \$750 and \$1,000 and/or up to 1 year in jail.

Unlawful Filming/Photographing

Video Voyeurism

[Title 11, Chapter 64, §2](#)

In Rhode Island, it is illegal for a person to videotape or transmit visual images of another person's intimate areas without that person's knowledge and consent and when that person should expect privacy.

If someone videotapes you while you are somewhere like a public restroom, changing room, or a locker room, or if a person takes video footage up your skirt or down your shirt while you're in a public area (such as walking up stairs or riding a bus), you can report him/her.

Penalty: Video voyeurism is punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or up 3 years in prison.

Indecent Exposure

Disorderly Conduct – Indecent Exposure

[Title 11, Chapter 45, §2](#)

In Rhode Island, it is illegal for a person to knowingly expose his or her genitals in the view of others for the purpose of sexual arousal when s/he should know the behavior will cause affront, distress, or alarm to the other person.

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: Disorderly conduct – indecent exposure is punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 and/or up to 1 year in jail. Persons convicted of this crime may also have to attend professional counseling.

Stop Street Harassment

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

Title 11, Chapter 59, §2

Stalking is illegal in Rhode Island. Stalking is defined as harassing or repeatedly following another person with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear of bodily injury.

If someone follows you at least twice with the intent to make you fear s/he will physically harm you, you can report that person for stalking.

Penalty: Stalking is a felony punishable by up to five years in prison, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.

Groping

Second Degree Sexual Assault

Title 11, Chapter 37, §5

In Rhode Island, groping is considered second degree sexual assault. This law prohibits anyone from subjecting another person to sexual contact without that person's consent by using force or because the person is unable to give consent due to a disability.

If a harasser grabs or slaps you on an intimate or private part of your body using physical force, or physically forces you to touch him or her on a private part of his or her body, you can report him/her.

Penalty: Second degree sexual assault is punishable by 3 to 15 years in prison. If the person assaulted is a child, the penalty rises to between 6 and 30 years 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. For example, in Providence, this number is (401) 272-3121 and in Newport it is (401) 847-1306. In Warwick, it is (401) 468-4200. 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 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 Video Voyeurism, Title 11, Chapter 64, Section 2. If you're not sure which law you should use to report an

Stop Street Harassment

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.
 - [Warwick](#) allows you to submit tips via webform, or by calling 401-732-8477.
 - Newport allows you to report by calling 401-846-2606.
- 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.