

Stop Street Harassment

Tennessee

A variety of forms of street harassment are illegal in Tennessee, 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 Tennessee, there are three laws that may apply to some form of verbal street harassment. There is a general law against harassment (Tenn. Code Ann. §39-17-308), but it only applies to harassment done via telephone, writing, or electronic communication.

Disorderly Conduct

[Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-17-305](#)

In Tennessee, it is considered disorderly conduct for anyone in a public place to make unreasonable noise that interferes with the business of others or to intentionally cause public annoyance or alarm by violent or threatening behavior.

If a street harasser is shouting and otherwise making loud noises, making threats, or engaging in threatening behavior (such as following you or standing really close to you while saying things that make you feel uncomfortable), you can report that person. Additionally, if the harasser is shouting and otherwise making loud noises, you can report him or her under this law.

Penalty: Disorderly conduct is a Class C misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$50, up to 30 days in jail, or both.

Patronizing Prostitution

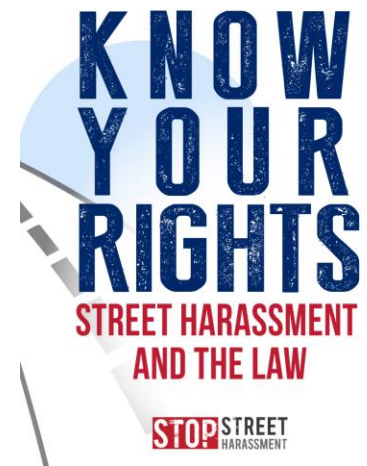
[Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-514](#)

It is illegal to patronize prostitution in Tennessee. If a street harasser solicits sexual activity from you, you can report him/her.

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.

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: Patronizing prostitution is a Class B misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of \$500. If patronizing prostitution takes place within 100 feet of a church or 1.5 miles of a school (all public and private schools that conduct classes in grades K-12), the charge rises to a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of \$1,500 or up to 11 months and 29 days in jail.



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Stalking

[Tenn. Code Ann. § 18.2-60.3](#)

A person can be convicted of stalking if, on more than one occasion, s/he harasses another person in a way that would cause a “[reasonable](#)” person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, or harassed.

If you encounter the same harasser multiple times (for example, s/he are often at your bus stop or the corner store where you shop) and the harasser’s actions or comments make you feel frightened or intimidated (for example, you worry the person may follow you home or the person’s actions make you want to stop going to the bus stop or the store because you feel intimidated), you can report that person under this law.

Penalty: Stalking is a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of \$1,500 or confinement in prison for up to 11 months and 29 days. It rises to a Class E felony if the harasser is a sex offender. The Penalty then is up to 1.5 years in prison and potentially a fine of up to \$3,000. The penalty can also vary depending on factors like if the harasser has a previous conviction.

Unlawful Filming/Photographing

Unlawful Photographing in Violation of Privacy

[Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-605](#)

In Tennessee, it is illegal for anyone to intentionally photograph someone in a place where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy and if:

- The photograph would offend or embarrass the person
- The photograph was taken for the sexual gratification of the photographer

If a harasser films or photographs you someplace like public restrooms, dressing rooms, locker rooms, and hotel rooms, you can report him/her.

While the law does not explicit states this, you can also try to report harassers who take photos up women’s skirts/dresses or down their tops while in public places.

Penalty: Unlawful photographing is a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of \$1,500 and/or up to 11 months and 29 days in jail.

Indecent Exposure

Public Indecency

[Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-511 \(a\)](#)

It is illegal in Tennessee for a person to intentionally expose his or her private parts or engage in any sexual act – including masturbation – in any public place.

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.

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Penalty: Public indecency is a Class B misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of \$500. It is a Class E felony when the defendant is at least 18 years old and the person being harassed is younger than 13 years old, punishable by up to 1.5 years in prison and/or a fine of up to \$3,000.

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

[Tenn. Code Ann. § 18.2-60.3](#)

Stalking is illegal in Tennessee. A person can be convicted of stalking if, on more than one occasion, s/he has “unconsented contact” with another person.

This means, if at least two times a harasser follows you, approaches you to harass you, or appears at your home or workplace without your permission and harasses you, you can report him/her.

Penalty: Stalking is a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of \$1,500 or confinement in prison for up to 11 months and 29 days. It rises to a Class E felony if the harasser is a sex offender. The Penalty then is up to 1.5 years in prison and potentially a fine of up to \$3,000. The penalty can also vary depending on factors like if the harasser has a previous conviction.

Groping

Assault

[Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-13-101](#)

In Tennessee, assault includes both causing physical injuries and intentionally or knowingly causing physical contact with another person that a “reasonable” person would find extremely offensive or provocative.

If anyone touches the private areas of your body or otherwise 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 him/her.

Penalty: Assault is a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of \$1,500 and/or up to 11 months and 29 days in jail.

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 Memphis, it is 901-545-COPS (2677) and in Nashville, it is (615) 862-8600. In Knoxville, it is

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865-215-7268. 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 Assault, § 39-13-101. 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.
 - In Memphis, you can do this by calling 901-528-CASH (2274), texting the number 274637 (CRIMES) and beginning the message with "AWARD" or submitting a [webtip](#).
 - In [Nashville](#), you can do this via webform or by completing their [Crimestoppers](#) webform. You can also call 74-CRIME.
 - 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.
 - 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.