



Collective Action for Safe Spaces (CASS) is a grassroots organization working to build safe public spaces free from public gendered harassment and assault using a survivor-centered, intersectional lens and community-led solutions. We work to promote the cultural norm that communities must take **collective responsibility for community safety**. We work to promote **collective responsibility for community safety**. To do so, we must **dismantle** existing policies that further enable state violence and **implement** new policies that use art, education, and resources to **build safety for everyone**.

Our policy platform is guided by our organizational values:

We center the margins.

In centering the voices and experiences of those who have been historically denied, neglected, or fully excluded by mainstream anti-violence feminist organizations, CASS seeks to broaden the public understanding of the problem of harassment, develop comprehensive solutions that meet the unique needs of different communities, and build safety for everyone.

People who live at the intersections of multiple oppressions often experience harassment with greater severity and less support. Our intersectional lens helps us come up with different solutions to meet different needs.

We use an intersectional lens.

We challenge harassment at its root.

Gendered harassment is about power and control. We explicitly name the role of gender while maintaining that other facets of our identities may affect our experiences.

The criminal legal system perpetuates and inflicts structural and interpersonal violence against the communities that we seek to prioritize in our advocacy.

We oppose the criminalization of gendered harassment.

We believe that everyone deserves to be treated with respect.

We seek to model this value by valuing the agency of, honoring the dignity of, and listening to everyone with whom we work.

Survivors are the experts of their experiences, and impacted communities are best equipped to support their own communities. We seek to build collective responsibility for community safety.

We strive to embody collective leadership.

Working at the Intersections

Street harassment is any unwanted, disrespectful, or threatening action or comment toward someone in a public space and directed at someone because of their actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, race, religious identity, housing status, ethnicity, ability, or any other protected trait in the DC Human Rights Act.

81% of women and 43% of men have experienced sexual harassment in a public space.¹

The threat of sexual assault is greater for queer, trans, and nonbinary people of color, people in the sex trades, and people experiencing homelessness.

- 60% of Black girls will experience sexual assault before they turn 18.²
- 60% of homeless youth have experienced physical or sexual violence on the street.³

Gendered violence is also frequently a cause of homelessness for these same communities.

- 46% of homeless youth experienced family rejection over their gender identity or sexual orientation.
- 1/3 of DC's homeless women indicated violence as the primary cause of their homelessness or housing.⁵

The same communities are also frequently targeted by law enforcement agents and state violence: Studies have shown that **sexual assault is the second most common form of police brutality.**

The threats to safety that marginalized communities experience - which often include harassment, discrimination, and violence on the basis of their multiple identities - are frequently excluded from the mainstream narrative around street harassment.

29% of DC's homeless women have engaged in survival sex, and 37% of DC's trans sex workers are homeless.

With options often limited by family rejection, employment discrimination, and homelessness, many women, queer, trans, and nonbinary people - especially people of color - engage in sex work to survive. While these are not the only experiences of sex work, and many people choose to engage in sex work for a variety of reasons, CASS focuses on street-based sex work.

Criminalization of sex work has led to increased stigma and violence against people in the sex trade, and violence is compounded for people who are left with no option apart from public spaces to trade sex. **Over 80% of street-based sex workers experience violence in the course of their work - frequently by police officers.**⁵ With the spring 2018 shutdown of major websites that made the sex trade safer, DC's most vulnerable sex workers have nowhere to turn but the street.

CASS seeks to center the experiences of trans and queer people of color in the sex trade experiencing homelessness in our advocacy to build safer public spaces free from street harassment. For these communities, harassment frequently manifests as discrimination and exclusion from public spaces, including public spaces where these communities seek to meet their basic needs. **48% of DC employers prefer a less qualified cisgender applicant over a more qualified transgender applicant.**⁶ Violence continues in spaces where homeless trans and queer people seek to access support, including from service providers. 41% of trans people that experience homelessness in DC report being physically or sexually assaulted by other shelter residents or staff.⁷ Trans people and people experiencing homelessness are also frequently discriminated against when seeking to access basic necessities like public restrooms.

When people must meet their basic needs in public spaces, **safety starts with access.**

¹ 2018 Stop Street Harassment study. ² Black Women's Blueprint. ³ National Network for Youth. ⁴ 2017 DC Women's Need Assessment. ⁵ Revolving Door: An Analysis of Street-Based Prostitution in New York City, report (New York City: Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center, 2003). ⁶ DC Office of Human Rights Study. ⁷ DC Trans Needs Assessment

Policies for Building Safety



We deserve safety from gendered harassment, especially while accessing basic necessities in public spaces.

Speakout in Ward 8 where organizers of a much-needed food table harassed and threatened a 16-year-old Black girl to the point at which she did not feel safe



We deserve freedom from gendered harassment in public spaces, especially gendered state violence.

Rally in front of Shaw Library after Muslim woman was targeted by DCPL police officer and told to take off her hijab or leave the library.



We deserve freedom from state violence, especially while working to access basic necessities in public spaces.

Rally at Eastern Market after FOSTA/SESTA further criminalizes sex work.

Freedom From Gendered Violence

Freedom From State Violence

Equitable Access to Public Spaces

Public safety starts with access including, but not limited to, access to a safe space to live, food, and basic sanitation. While we recognize that we do not know what makes any space safe or unsafe for each individual, we have identified these three intertwined aspects of safety as the priorities of our advocacy.

Through our research and our experiences working with communities in the DC Metropolitan area, we have identified three primary barriers that local women, queer people, trans people, nonbinary people, people of color, people in the sex trade, people experiencing homelessness, and people who hold multiple marginalized identities face in accessing safety in public spaces: gendered violence, state violence, and discrimination in accessing public spaces. These barriers often intersect through harassment and violence by state actors, criminalization of strategies used to survive, and harassment and violence by those in a position to provide access to basic necessities. This problem is compounded for people who seek to access their basic necessities in public spaces, including people using shelters or tents for housing, people who need access to public restrooms, and people who utilize local service providers to meet their needs. CASS seeks to ensure that public spaces are safe - and accessible - for everyone.

Gendered Violence & State Violence

Criminalization of gendered violence survivors.

Supportive strategies:

- Freedom campaigns
- Letter-writing to state actors
- Art & educational material

Criminalization of sex work.

Supportive strategies:

- Decriminalize all aspects of sex work
- Develop living-wage employment opportunities for people seeking alternatives to sex work

State Violence & Access to Public Spaces

Criminalization of accessing public spaces.

Supportive strategies:

- Decriminalization of anti-homeless ordinances
- Responding to state destruction of tent cities
- Responding to anti-homeless architecture
- Decriminalization of fare evasion. Increase access to public restrooms

Ending discrimination against people experiencing homelessness.

Supportive Strategies:

- Art and public education campaigns to affirm marginalized identities and publicize resources
- Recourse and legal services for people who experience discrimination



Gendered Violence & Access to Public Spaces

Prevention of public gendered violence

Supportive strategies:

- Citywide data, training/education, and awareness campaigns
- Incentives for businesses to participate in anti-harassment training
- Increased investments in gendered harassment and violence prevention education in K-12

Addressing gendered violence as a cause of homelessness. E.g. intimate partner violence. Sexual violence. Familial rejection of LGBTQIA+ identities.

Supportive Strategies:

- Funding for emergency shelters with supportive, trauma informed resources for survivors fleeing immediate violence
- Funding for service-entrenched transitional and permanent supportive housing
- Increased investments in gendered violence prevention education.
- Culturally specific services for survivors

Campaign Tiers

We envision a world where solutions for building public safety are rooted in research, education, art, storytelling, access to resources, and grassroots organizing.

In a historic victory for the movement against street harassment, CASS spearheaded the introduction and passage of the Street Harassment Prevention Act (SHPA). Passed and funded in 2018, this bill establishes an advisory committee to collect citywide data about street harassment and recommend data-informed policies to address and prevent it, including a citywide awareness campaign and bystander intervention training for all public employees. SHPA also created the first legal definition of street harassment in the U.S., broadly defining street harassment to include harassment on the basis of multiple identities that an individual may hold. After SHPA became law, we adopted the following campaign tiers to support, within the bounds of our capacity, campaigns that build the vision outlined in this platform:

Tier 1 Support

- Acts as a convener or key member of coalitions
- Creates communications strategy and informational materials
- Crafts petitions and/or statements of support
- Organizes lobby days, outreach events, rallies, and strategy meetings Recruits and prepares community members to submit testimony

Tier 2 Support

- Participates in coalitions or steering committees as a member
- Takes online action and amplifies campaign on social media
- Edits and endorses statements of support Sends representative to campaign events as speaker or supporter
- Submits testimony to the DC Council
- May develop some graphics or informational materials

Tier 3 Support

- Endorses statements of support
- Takes online action and amplifies campaign on social media
- May submit testimony to the DC Council

CASS currently supports the following legislation:

	Equitable Access to Public Spaces	Gendered Harassment and Violence	Criminalization of Survival Tactics
Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act of 2017	✓		✓
Michael A. Stoops Anti-Discrimination Act of 2017	✓	✓	
Street Harassment Prevention Act		✓	
Decriminalization of Sex Work		✓	✓
Decriminalization of Fare Evasion	✓		✓
Free GiGi	✓	✓	✓

Reducing Criminalization to Improve Community Health and Safety Amendment Act of 2017

Aims to remove the criminal penalties associated with consensual sex work in the District of Columbia -- known as decriminalization of sex work. This would allow sex workers to stay safer from interpersonal and state violence while reducing barriers that sex workers face in accessing alternative opportunities.

Fare Evasion Decriminalization Act of 2017

Offers relief for those bearing the brunt of high fares and the criminalization of poverty. This bill would make fare evasion a civil offense, reducing the fine to \$100 and ending imprisonment over fare evasion.

Public Restroom Facilities Installation and Promotion Act of 2017

Focuses on increasing the number of public restroom facilities available to those in need, by adding at least ten additional facilities to places with limited access to public restrooms. The bill would also create a subsidy program to incentivize private businesses to keep their restrooms open to the public.

Michael A. Stoops Anti-Discrimination Act of 2017

Works to amend the Human Rights Act of 1977 to protect those experiencing homelessness from discrimination. The bill amends the phrase "and place of residence or business" and replaces it with "place of residence or business, and homeless status" as well as other phrases in the DC Official Code, to reflect the reality of homelessness.

CASS also seeks to end the criminalization of survivors of gendered violence, including GiGi Thomas -- a former sex worker and human rights advocate incarcerated since October 2015 for actions she took to survive. Learn more about the campaign to #FreeGiGi at FreeGiGi.com.