

# **Borough President Stringer Releases Report on Sexual Assault and Harassment in NYC Subway System**

*Study Finds Alarming High Number of New Yorkers have been Harassed or Assaulted, Most Offenses go Unreported by Victims and Witnesses*

**July 26, 2007 (New York, NY)** – Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer today released a new report that finds an alarmingly high number of New Yorkers have been the victims of sexual harassment or assault in the New York City subway system. The study also shows that an overwhelming number of these crimes are going unreported by victims and witnesses.

The report, "Hidden in Plain Sight, Sexual Harassment and Assault in the New York City Subway System," was released at a press conference in front of the Union Square subway station where Borough President Stringer was joined by leading straphanger advocates, sexual assault victims advocates and people who have experienced sexual harassment or assault on the subway.

"For far too long in New York City, there's been a credo that what happens underground stays underground," Stringer said. "That feeds a system where women, especially, are victimized, and instead of fighting back, become afraid, ashamed, and believe that nothing can be done. We're talking about crimes that are hidden in plain sight. In fact, it is hard to find a woman who rides the subway who hasn't been harassed – or who doesn't know someone who has been. Our goal is to raise the profile of these crimes, so that the police can formulate a plan to combat them, and so that the victims can be empowered to fight back."

Key Findings of the report include:

- 63 percent of respondents reported having been sexually harassed in the New York City subway system.
- 10 percent of respondents reported having been sexually assaulted in the New York City subway system.
- 69 percent of respondents reported having felt the threat of sexual assault or harassment in the New York City subway system.
- Of those respondents, 51 percent reported "sometimes" or "frequently" feeling the threat of sexual harassment or assault in the New York City subway system.
- 96 percent of respondents who indicated that they were sexually harassed did not contact the NYPD and/or the MTA to file a report or seek assistance.
- 86 percent of respondents who indicated that they were sexually assaulted did not contact the NYPD and/or the MTA to file a report or seek assistance.

"RightRides for Women's Safety is committed to building safer communities by ending harassment and sexual assault. We applaud the report issued by Borough President Stringer's office for bringing to light the often ignored 'every day terror' that thousands of riders face: sexual harassment and assault in our subway system," said Oraia Reid, Executive Director of RightRides for Women's Safety. "We believe that sexual harassment and assault can and will be stopped with the concentrated efforts of the MTA, NYPD and the community of millions of vigilant subway riders."

"At just about every community meeting I have attended in 25 years as a transit advocate, riders have complained to me about being the victim of inappropriate sexual harassment," said Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for the Straphangers Campaign. "I congratulate Borough President Scott Stringer for shining a spotlight on this sad reality and proposing some good ideas for responding to it."

The report points out that the MTA and NYPD do not make subway sexual harassment or assault data publicly available. As a result, Stringer said, the survey presents the first widespread account of straphangers' experiences and impressions of sexual harassment and assault in New York City subways.

Stringer proposed a series of recommendations to combat the problem including:

- Ensuring that the NYPD tracks subway sexual harassment and assault crimes as stand-alone offenses; tracks the prevalence of these crimes across time, borough, individual subway lines, and stations; and makes all of these statistics publicly available and easily accessible.
- Increasing NYPD presence on subway trains and in subway stations.
- Introducing and upgrading needed safety amenities throughout the transit network.
- Launching an ongoing public awareness campaign to educate riders about the risk of sexual harassment and assault in the subway system, preventive measures that riders can take, steps that victims of sexual harassment and assault can take to seek support, and the overall importance of reporting sexual harassment and assault incidents to authorities.

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