



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

For the entire history of Black People in America, we have been trying to convince society at large – our institutions, our decision-makers, and communities as a whole – of our humanity. We have tried for centuries now, to convey, that we *are* people, that we *are* deserving of respect, and that our viewpoints, perspectives and experiences are at least as valid as anyone else's.

Mere days after the release of the Gender Equity Commission's Report on Pittsburgh's inequality across gender and race empirically confirmed what most any black woman in Pittsburgh would tell you – that of all its denizens Pittsburgh is "arguably the most unlivable for black women", we have yet another stark example of how identity, societal perceptions and implicit bias inform the interactions we have with each other.

Here we have black women being brutally beaten for demanding a refund.

We urge you to acknowledge that these conditions in fact existed, and that they are more than random. Victims of most crimes aren't beaten in the broad daylight without fear of retribution. There's a certain level of superiority and hubris that underlies these vicious attacks, and the frequency and blatant disregard with which the assailants batter black women reveals a deeper truth about our society and the way we think about black women.

We are not surprised. This is both a pattern and a trend.

In the wake of these hateful assaults, this community's collective pain is felt further when we hear people justify such offenses and by knowing that no matter how many of these interactions we as a community record, and no matter how much restraint we exhibit in the face of abuse, that our society has failed us in its incapacity to recognize our humanity.

No matter how well we "perform civility," our trauma continues to be undermined by the politics of respectability that insult and disregard our intelligence and our integrity. Black Women are tired of being asked if they are sure they knew what happened when one of our own is attacked. Black Women are tired of shouldering the burden of proof – one, having to not only prove that they were victimized, but that they were abused with malice. We are tired of presenting evidence and yet still being dubiously asked "well what happened before the camera started rolling to cause this?"

We encourage you to consider what the regional response might have been if the identities of those involved in this attack were different – what would the perception be then? How might the situation be framed? Would the community have responded differently?

In reflecting upon the recent assault of a woman of color in a Milano's pizzeria in uptown, we implore anyone who might be concerned with the progress of our society to listen, take heed, and acknowledge. We must stand together despite any obstacle ahead of us. Instead of forgetting what certainly was not an isolated incident, educate yourself and investigate the social phenomena that are controversial and too common. Please help us advance the legacy of civil rights and steward a more compassionate and constructive society.

Our hearts go out to Jamila and Ashia Regan, our hearts go out to their families, our hearts go out to the community, and our hearts go out to all of those who feel the pain of disenfranchisement.

Signed,

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