

Mary Watkins

2218 N 36th Street

Milwaukee, WI 53208

The Honorable Chairman Terry L. Witkowski

Council Members of the Public Safety Committee

200 E. Wells Street, Room 205

Milwaukee, WI 53202

April 8th, 2015

To the Hon. Chairman Terry Witkowski, Vice-Chairman Robert Puente, and Council Members Joe Dudzik, Bob Donovan and Joe Davis Sr.:

This letter is regarding the panhandling ordinance sponsored by Ald. Donovan. The ordinance raises a number of concerns. It criminalizes the poor instead of adequately addressing the privation that leads to panhandling. Despite the myths, the primary reason for panhandling is need. People need food, gas, and bus fare. The working poor who are not homeless will panhandle because, after living expenses, they do not have enough money to afford these items. Additionally, the drastic reduction in SNAP benefits this month will drive even more people to these desperate measures to feed themselves and their families.

The ordinance also sets the stage for more unnecessary and potentially violent encounters with law enforcement. At a time when we are supposed to be healing and progressing toward racial harmony, this will only further stigmatize our city.

Milwaukee is the second poorest major city in the country. This should be an opportunity to confront the reasons why such pervasive poverty exists here. In this vein, we need to have public hearings on this matter. We should also reach out directly to people who panhandle, neighborhoods, and business owners to find better solutions than citations or jail time.

The best way to deal with panhandling is to provide decent, plentiful alternatives that allow people to have the dignity of sustaining themselves. This ordinance, by criminalizing panhandling, will undermine any future attempts at finding gainful employment. This challenge is further accentuated for communities of color. If we want to provide a meaningful solution to poverty in Milwaukee, this

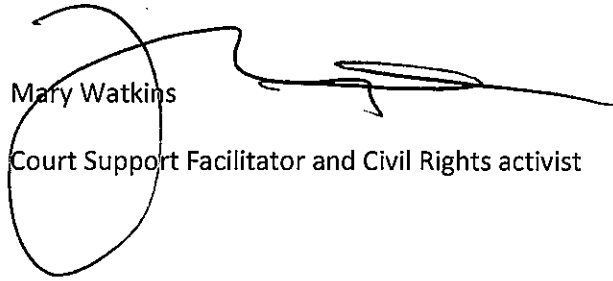
ordinance will not accomplish that. If we want to begin a journey towards healing and justice in Milwaukee, this ordinance will achieve the opposite effect.

We can do better than this. As a lifelong resident and taxpayer, I demand better than this.

Sincerely,

Mary Watkins

Court Support Facilitator and Civil Rights activist

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Watkins', is written over the printed name. The signature is stylized with a large loop at the beginning and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.