



MEMORANDUM

LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

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To: Ald. Terry Witkowski
From: Dana Zelazny – Legislative Fiscal Analyst
Date: October 14, 2015
Subject: HOW OTHER CITIES USE PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS TO DISCOURAGE PANHANDLING

This memo is in response to your request for information relating to U.S. cities with public education and information programs aimed at discouraging panhandling. The LRB has found many cities with public awareness programs aimed at convincing drivers and pedestrians to stop giving cash or other handouts to panhandlers. In general, these programs encourage the public to donate money that would have gone to panhandlers to charitable agencies instead. A sampling of these cities and their programs is further explained below.

ANN ARBOR, MI

Ann Arbor launched the “Real Help” drive in 2012 with posters, informational cards and a website. Promotional materials suggest that donations to panhandlers support drug and alcohol addictions, and ask the public to donate to local homeless outreach agencies instead. The informational cards also include the names and contact information for a variety of homeless and addiction support agencies.

BOISE, ID

Boise initiated the “Have a Heart, Give Smart” program during the 2013 holiday shopping season with signs, brochures, citywide billboards, website banner ads and television and radio traffic reports. The program provides tips for how to decline panhandler requests, as well as donation information for a variety of local outreach agencies. Have a Heart, Give Smart asks the public to make sure their donations have the most positive impact possible by giving smart, i.e. to agencies, rather than to panhandlers.

DENVER, CO

Denver commenced the “Better Way to Give” campaign in 2007 to educate the public about local homeless support agencies and how to donate easily via donation meters. In 2013, Better Way to Give updated the donation meters to accept credit/debit as well as cash. While marketing materials for business partners discusses reducing panhandling, Better Way to Give does not explicitly ask the public to stop giving to panhandlers.

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

Ft. Lauderdale embarked on an anti-panhandling drive in 2012 with signs, banners, taxi cabs, ads and residential utility bills bearing the slogan “Panhandling – Don’t Contribute to the Problem, Contribute to the Solution”. Promotional materials state that giving directly to

panhandlers can lead to drug and alcohol abuse, violent crime, harassment and distracted drivers. The program asks the public to make a real change in the lives of local children and families by giving to local agencies rather than to panhandlers.

INDIANAPOLIS, IN

Indianapolis introduced the “Know Outlets” campaign in 2014 with informational materials, donation kiosks and repurposed “donation” parking meters. The campaign focuses on educating the public about the many local agencies (outlets) supporting the homeless and how and where to donate to these agencies. Know Outlets is billed as a public/private commitment with donations from local businesses, and includes public education, fundraising and outreach. Local media coverage has assumed that the overall goal of Know Outlets is to reduce the number of panhandlers on Indianapolis streets by redirecting donations to homeless agencies. However, the Know Outlets campaign does not explicitly ask the public to stop giving to panhandlers.

MARYSVILLE/ARLINGTON, WA and PARKERSBURG, WV

In 2013, the cities of Marysville and Arlington installed window decals and 30 street signs that read “Keep the Change: Don’t Support Panhandling”. The bottom of the signs read “Give to a Local Charity”. Parkersburg took a more confrontational approach, installing street signs asking the public not to contribute to drug and alcohol problems by giving money to panhandlers. The cities did little else in terms of public education and awareness.

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Minneapolis launched the “Give Real Change” initiative in 2009 with posters and a website, and expanded the program in 2014 to electronic billboards and marquees in the downtown area. Give Real Change focuses on panhandling as a demeaning way of life and an ineffective method for panhandlers to improve their living situations. Give Real Change asks the public to donate to homeless outreach agencies, where their money will be used more effectively to change panhandlers’ lives.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

Montgomery County introduced the “Give a Hand Up, Not a Hand Out” program in 2013 following the traffic death of a known panhandler. Promotional materials state that many panhandlers are neither homeless nor local, use donated money to support addictions, and are not safe moving in and out of traffic accepting donations through car windows. Give a Hand Up, Not a Hand Out promotes the idea that people panhandle because others are willing to give them cash, and would stop doing so if donors redirected their giving. The program includes a donation by text feature linked to agencies for homelessness, mental illness and addiction.

SAN ANTONIO, TX

The San Antonio Police Department launched the “Change That Makes a Difference” campaign in 2014 with public service announcements and informational cards. The program encourages those who want to donate to the needy to do so safely, and emphasizes that street corner donations to panhandlers don’t always have the desired effect and may hurt more than help. The informational cards promote a partnering homeless outreach agency and include a QR code linked to the agency’s donation webpage.

SAN BERNARDINO, CA

The San Bernardino Sheriff's Department initiated the "Positive Change not Spare Change" program in 2014 with signs, posters, flyers and bumper stickers. The program focuses on educating the public that many panhandlers are not homeless and that giving to panhandlers may be contributing to a drug or alcohol addiction. Positive Change Not Spare Change is promoted in conjunction with a zero-tolerance approach to aggressive panhandling.

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