



# Panhandling

Public Safety Committee Meeting

November 28, 2017

# Speakers

- Second Lieutenant Jonathan Stern, Fairfax County Police Department
- Dean Klein, Director, Fairfax County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness
- Tony Castrilli, Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs
- John Burton, Assistant County Attorney

# Why Panhandling

- During the June 20, 2017, public comment the Board of Supervisors requested the Police Department, the County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, and the County Attorney develop a response to panhandling within Fairfax County.

# Goals

- Educate the community on panhandling
- Ensure the safety of all in our county
- Maintain an informed and collaborative community environment
- Fairfax County advises residents not to give money to panhandlers; rather contribute to social service programs.

# Public Education

- Create a website specifically addressing Panhandling containing the following information:

## **PANHANDLING**

Panhandling can be found in areas of our county and frequently generates questions and complaints. Panhandlers who are truly in need require more resources than small amounts of money and the county has many services available to help those in need.

# Public Education (Continued)

Here are some important things to know about Fairfax County's approach to this issue:

- **Laws**
- Asking for money is a protected act under the First Amendment.
- Asking for money in public areas, including roadway medians, is not a violation of law.
- The County monitors legal developments related to panhandling.

# Public Education (Continued)

- **Public Safety**
- Our police officers will intervene when panhandlers commit traffic offenses or engage in criminal activity.
- If you witness a panhandler breaking the law, contact the Fairfax County Police Department. The emergency number is 9-1-1 and the non-emergency number is 703-691-2131.
- Our police officers are very responsive and will take immediate action if a crime is being committed. Proactive community assistance with reducing criminal activity is invaluable.
- Police officers refer panhandlers they encounter to available Fairfax County services, but **cannot force them to receive services.**

# Public Education (Continued)

- **Panhandlers**

- Not all panhandlers are homeless, but may be in need of food and other critical services.
- However, not all stories panhandlers use to solicit money are true.
- Some panhandlers come from outside Fairfax County or even outside Virginia.
- Some panhandlers operate as part of organized, professional panhandling rings.



# Public Education (Continued)

- **Why To Not Give Money**
  - **Giving money to panhandlers will encourage more panhandling.**
  - Donations of cash will not help to solve the underlying reasons why someone panhandles. Panhandlers who are truly in need require more resources than small amounts of money.
  - Panhandlers' needs can be met much more effectively through our social services.

# Public Education (Continued)

- Refer panhandlers – or anyone you see who may be in need - to Fairfax County social services programs. We have a wide-range of services and **housing** resources **to assist those who are in need.**
- If you do want to assist a panhandler, make copies of this handout with information on where and how to obtain critical services, including food and shelter.
- Donate to or volunteer for one of our [nonprofit community partners](#) dedicated to assisting those in need.

# Public Education (Continued)

- County residents can obtain brochures listing available community and County services from the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness or from the district offices of individual Board of Supervisors members
- **We can provide assistance to people and families who are seeking shelter or services:**
- Call [703-222-0880](tel:703-222-0880), TTY 711, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Our multilingual staff can assist callers in **Amharic, Dari, Farsi, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Pashto, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, Swedish, Tigrinya, and Urdu**. Information is also available in other languages.

# Public Education (Continued)

## Fairfax County Services

### Mental illness, substance use disorders and intellectual disabilities

- Contact: Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB). Provides services for people with mental illness, substance use disorders and intellectual disabilities.
- **Entry and Referrals: 703-383-8500, TTY 711; Emergency Services: 703-573-5679, TTY 711**
- **Victims of domestic violence**
- Contact: **Fairfax County Domestic Violence Hotline/Helpline**. 24-hour hotline and helpline for victims of domestic violence to provide information and referrals for shelter, counseling services and treatment.
- **Call 703-360-7273, TTY 711**

# Public Education (Continued)

- Create a video that can be played on Channel 16 and embedded on County webpages that describes how to help panhandlers who are in need (similar to our peer jurisdictions):

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/panhandling/>

- Ensure that the available County resources are widely known
- Raise awareness regarding the legalities associated with panhandling

# Future Considerations

- County agencies will continue to collaborate with other stakeholders, to include non-profits, community organizations, and the business community, on effective responses to panhandling and review alternative strategies and best practices
- Ensure the community remains informed
- Ensure individuals are informed of available resources and services

# Questions