

Jennifer Shaw
DEPUTY DIRECTOR



March 17, 2010

Seattle City Council
Public Safety and Education Committee
600 4th Ave. 2nd Floor
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Re: C.B. 116807, Aggressive Solicitation

Dear Members of the Public Safety and Education Committee,

On behalf of the thousands of ACLU members in Seattle -- and more than 20,000 ACLU across the state -- I write in opposition to C.B. 116807, a proposal creating an aggressive solicitation infraction.

This is an unnecessary proposal that will be an ineffective tool to address the problems of homelessness and poverty on Seattle streets and is not the proper approach to address concerns about safety downtown. Seattle already has an aggressive panhandling ordinance; we don't need another one. Seattle also has laws prohibiting harassment, assault and other violent behavior. If people engage in threatening behavior, they can and should be arrested and charged as appropriate.

This proposed law will do little to stop aggressive behavior, but could be misused to target "undesirable" people who panhandle to support themselves yet make others feel uncomfortable due to their appearance, manner of speaking or physical attributes.

Moreover, this ordinance is divisive and has distracted the public attention away from other proposals that will have a positive impact on public safety. It has created the impression that the city is attempting to solve its problems by blaming panhandling as a key cause of street crime in downtown Seattle. Actions that would be effective in dealing with safety include increasing police foot patrols and augmenting services to people who are homeless or mentally ill or drug addicted. Unfortunately, these positive proposals have been lost in the controversy about the purpose and intent behind the unnecessary panhandling legislation.

We urge you to reject C.B. 116807 and support effective efforts that will actually make our streets safer.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Shaw
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