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A Statement from the Asbury Park Mayor and City Council – 10/30/18

The City of Asbury Park prides itself on being one of the most welcoming communities within the State of New Jersey, and the country. A recent news article paints us in the opposite light – counter our beliefs, our thoughts, and our mindset in being an open and tolerant city, accepting of everyone. The article in regards to “aggressive panhandling” also only paints half the picture.

The City has its own Department of Social Services to help people in need. The staff routinely walks and drives the City seeking out those who need help. Sometimes people want help. Sometimes people do not want help. Regardless, it’s always offered. The Department of Social Services also attends Municipal Court hearings to pro-actively seek out individuals who can benefit from the services and programs the City has to offer.

What residents may not know is that while the City and Monmouth County are home to numerous non-profit social service providers, the majority of these providers can only provide part-time care. For example, one of the largest providers can only provide care for overnight hours, resulting in their clients not having anywhere to go during the day. Unfortunately, this gap in the system has persisted for years. More and more non-profit providers have to turn away individuals simply because they do not have the expertise to help. And many of the individuals who are turned away end up panhandling for money.

Also due to the gaps in the delivery system of social service providers, more and more individuals seeking help are being transported to Asbury Park. Regretfully, some of these individuals have exhibited aggressive behavior towards residents and visitors as they seek money—resulting in people being harassed, including physical touching, being menacingly screamed at, threats of violence, and being followed for blocks on end. The public has come to Council meetings to share their experiences with aggressive panhandling, and even more have spoken privately of their experience with our elected officials and staff.

To protect all involved, the City narrowly tailored an anti-aggressive panhandling Ordinance, leaving open ample alternative means of communications for those in need. The City’s Social Services Department continues to work with individuals who need assistance. And the City will continue to meet our obligation to protect our residents and visitors from aggressive behavior. But, the City is not in the business of making criminals out of people who need help – which is why we do not agree with the ACLU’s suggestion that the City should “charge people with assault.”

The City of Asbury Park is in the business of helping those who need help. We are in the business of protecting our residents and visitors. We are in the business of providing social services to those who need assistance. And we are in the business of upholding our belief that Asbury Park is an open, accepting and tolerant City.