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FOR INFORMATION CALL

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March 1, 2016

Ald. Terry L. Witkowski  
(414) 286-2883

## **Council adopts “Keep the Change” initiative to address panhandling**

The Common Council voted today to approve establishing a “**Keep the Change**” program aimed at addressing the city’s burgeoning panhandling problem.

The multifaceted resolution to create the “Keep the Change” program, sponsored by **Alderman Terry L. Witkowski**, was adopted on a unanimous vote by the full Council today at City Hall.

Alderman Witkowski, chair of the Public Safety Committee, said Milwaukee and other cities are seeing a growing number of panhandlers, especially individuals standing at intersections, near off-ramps and on medians asking for money. “The problem in recent years has been made worse by people thinking they are helping by giving the panhandlers easy money – money that most likely will be used for items that feed addiction,” he said.

“The ‘Keep the Change’ initiative will offer common sense alternative options and information about resources, and the overall effort can reduce the (panhandling) problem,” he said.

Studies have shown that donations given to panhandlers are frequently used to support dependencies, and rarely result in any long-term improvement in the panhandlers’ quality of life. “Keep the Change” aims to both reduce the number of panhandlers funding dependencies through donations and to provide meaningful support for those who are affected by homelessness, Alderman Witkowski has said.

**-More-**

## **Keep the Change/ADD ONE**

“It should be noted that up to 70% of the panhandlers are not homeless, according to the Milwaukee Police Department and the District Attorney’s Office,” the alderman said.

The legislation directs the city Department of Administration to establish “Keep the Change” to discourage donations to panhandlers and encourage donations to charities that provide shelter, food, clothing and other services. It will include the distribution of informational cards and a city website to act as a clearinghouse for resources and places to donate.

Specifically, “Keep the Change” features include:

- A city-wide public awareness campaign focused on discouraging donations to panhandlers. Instead, citizens would be encouraged to donate to charitable agencies that provide food, shelter and other services.
- City signage (in the right-of-way) promoting the “Keep the Change” campaign within the City of Milwaukee.
- A city website to act as a clearinghouse for resources to assist those who are in need of food, shelter or other services.
- Information cards relating to the availability of social services through the Milwaukee County 2-1-1 hotline.
- Forming partnerships with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) that are engaged to discourage giving to panhandlers while encouraging donations to charities providing food, shelter and other key services.