



# *City of Columbia Police Department*



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## **NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 25, 2008

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### **Aggressive Begging Ordinance**

The City of Columbia Police Department will begin enforcing a new ordinance, Ordinance No.: 2008-031, Begging, obstructing pedestrian or vehicular traffic (Aggressively Begging Ordinance). The Columbia Police Department is committed to enforcing this and all City ordinances. The Columbia Police asks for your cooperation and patience as this new ordinance is enforced.

### **Columbia Police would like to offer some information when one is presented with an aggressive begging situation:**

- Any stranger who approaches you on the street should be viewed with caution, regardless of their appearance
- Keep moving. If you're in a relatively open area—a city street, say, or a park—pick up your pace and put some distance between yourself and the person asking for money. If he/she blocks your way, don't shove him/her aside—just step off the sidewalk (or curb) or cross to the other side of the street. You may even want to backtrack and get to where you're going by an alternate route.
- Say as little as possible. Here's how this (unfortunately common) exchange usually goes: "Hey buddy, can you spare a dollar?" "Sorry, no." "What's the matter? Aren't I good enough? You look like you can afford it!" At this point, you may be tempted to utter an expletive, or venture something smart like "I work for my money, why don't you?" The trouble is, anything you say (besides repeating "Sorry, no") is likely to further antagonize the panhandler, who's already shown unusually aggressive and unpredictable behavior.
- Don't give in. If this exchange takes place in your own neighborhood, the last thing you want to do is show the panhandler (whom you're likely to encounter over and over) that you can be intimidated into giving. But even if you're on vacation in another city, it's not wise to stop and take out your wallet—because there's always the chance (however slim) that the panhandler will simply snatch it and run away.
- If you feel that the panhandler represents a genuine threat to your safety, don't take a chance by engaging in heated conversation or brushing past him; run the other way and, if necessary, call for help from

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passersby or the police. It may seem foolish to react this way to a seemingly harmless situation, but it's better to be safe than sorry—if your gut instinct says a person is dangerous, he probably is.

- Always report any confrontation that you have with someone who physically or verbally forces you to give them money to the City of Columbia Police Department.

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\*Media Note: Ordinance No.: 2008-031 Attached