Public Comment Received for July 31, 2025 Public Safety Committee

Hello Members of the Public Safety Committee,

I am writing with comments/concerns on two items on the agenda for tomorrow's public safety committee meeting -- the panhandling ordinance and technology in public safety.

1. **Please do not expand the panhandling ordinance.** While I agree that we need to protect pedestrians, I do not think that punishing our most vulnerable community members with fines and misdemeanors helps to achieve that. We should focus our resources on solutions centering care instead of punishment. I believe that a resourced community is a safe community -- why can't we direct our city resources toward directing people to and funding care instead of creating an entry point to being ensnared in the criminal justice system? I do not think we can punish our way to safety in this situation.
2. **Please create safeguards and transparency around privacy rights for the technology used by local government and law enforcement.** Any system that exists with access to sensitive data is a potential vector for abuse. We should always be asking how the data that we're collecting and storing can be used to harm others, and should put safeguards in place accordingly. How is access restricted and audited for proper use? How is data shared with other law enforcement agencies? Is facial recognition technology used? How long is data stored? As community members, we should be able to have a basic awareness of how and when we're being recorded, what spaces are/aren't private, who has access to the systems' data, and how surveillance data is safeguarded. For example, is our new Flock system of cameras having its dataset queried by officers in other jurisdictions across the country working with ICE or investigating people who had abortions as has been happening to other Police Departments' Flock datasets nationwide? How are we ensuring our tools for public safety are not creating vectors for harm in the wrong hands? I hope that there can be space for some type of ethics or privacy rights safeguards in the new Technology & Intelligence Division.

Thank you,
Nicole Lopez

--From: cohen.rachel89@gmail.com
To: AVLPublicSafety@publicinput.com
Subject: Comments on agenda items 4 and 5

Hello Committee members,

I hope you will consider the following input as you discuss the panhandling ordinance and the increased use of technology in public safety.

With regard to the agenda item "Expansion of Panhandling Ordinance/ High Traffic Zones":
1. The presentation seems to imply that panhandling causes pedestrian-vehicle crashes, but no evidence is presented showing a causal relationship. There may indeed be a lot of vehicle crashes and a lot of panhandling calls in these locations, but correlation does not equal causation. I'm sure if you tallied it, these locations would also have a lot of restaurants, retailers, pedestrians, trash cans, parking spaces, etc. But that doesn't mean we should conclude that trash cans cause pedestrian-vehicle crashes!

2. There is a real lack of clarity on the problem that Council/the PD is trying to solve. Is the goal (a) to decrease crashes/improve pedestrian safety or is it (b) to decrease panhandling? These problems require distinct solutions, and it's not clear that the proposed changes to the panhandling ordinance would solve either one of them!

- If we want to decrease crashes/improve pedestrian safety, we could implement evidence-based strategies like improving crosswalk infrastructure, implementing traffic calming tactics, shoring up street lighting and sidewalks, etc.
- If we want to decrease panhandling, we would need to address why people typically panhandle: they are poor and likely feel that they can't meet their basic needs in other ways. If we devote more funds to social services, we might be able to decrease panhandling.

With regard to the agenda item "Technology in Public Safety":
I am disappointed that the presentation is not posted as of 4pm on Wednesday, July 30th even though public comment is due at 5pm. There have been reports that the department would like to increase the use of AI and this may be the subject of the presentation. If that is the case, I think it's important for the committee to consider that AI can often lead to further bias in policing: ACLU: AI Generated Police Reports Raise Concerns Around Transparency, Bias, NAACP: Artificial Intelligence in Predictive Policing Issue Brief.

Thank you,
Rachel Cohen

From: nitarakittles@gmail.com
To: AVLPublicSafety@publicinput.com
Subject: Panhandling in Asheville-Public comment for Meeting on July 31

Hello,

I'm writing to urge you to **not** take steps towards criminalizing panhandling in Asheville by designating areas as high traffic. Many of the people on the streets right now were displaced in Helene. They are part of our community, and their right to panhandle is protected under free speech. We should be working towards real solutions to get people off the streets rather than just trying to incarcerate them.

Thank you,

Nitara Kittles
(Local born and raised in Asheville, NC)