

# OPINION: It's time for state legislators to take on the panhandling issue

New Bedford has a major problem with panhandlers and there is nothing the city is willing to do about it. Seeing a major intersection without a panhandler on it is a rare occurrence. Seeing multiple panhandlers at an intersection is a common occurrence. It seems that cities and towns across Massachusetts are forced to take on the panhandling issues alone with zero help from state legislators. Why aren't our state, or even our federal legislators, tackling this issue?

For a city to take on the panhandler issue means to take on the ACLU who sues every city that tries to pass an ordinance against the practice of panhandling. The ACLU considers panhandling freedom of speech and has lawyers at the ready to challenge any city brave enough to challenge panhandlers. It's clear that panhandlers know this therefore increasing the number of panhandlers over the years. It seems the police could scare them off fairly quickly a few years ago, but now they know they don't have to move and have become more bold.

The City of Cranston recently passed anti-panhandling legislation and the city was **immediately sued in federal court by the ACLU**. This will be costly for the city and all other cities will be waiting for the outcome – a win by Cranston would have similar ordinances passed among dozens of cities almost immediately. A loss could mean millions of dollars of tax payers money as punishment.

It's time the panhandling issue be brought to the State level where they have the resources to take on the ACLU in court. Legislation should be passed, signed by the governor and then fought all the way to the Massachusetts Supreme Court when

challenged by the ACLU. Cities shouldn't be forced to allow panhandlers to take over their city because of the fear of a multi-million dollar lawsuit from the ACLU. It's time for Massachusetts legislators to forget about pay raises and new ways to tax us, and take on the panhandling issue that is frustrating cities and draining their budgets.