

Q&A: Understanding Panhandling

The City of Highland Park has received numerous inquiries regarding panhandling. Panhandling, or asking members of the public for money in public spaces such as street corners or in parking lots, typically increases during the holiday season. This is not unique to Highland Park, as an increase in panhandling is occurring across the state. Because panhandling is legal in Illinois, the City is limited in how it can respond to and support individuals who are panhandling.

It is heartbreaking to see individuals in need, particularly during the winter months. However, experts recommend that community members do not give money to those who are panhandling. There are numerous organizations and programs well-established throughout Lake County to address the underlying causes of panhandling, such as food or job insecurity, housing insecurity, or lack of access to healthcare. Cash donations do not help solve these underlying causes, and may leave donors vulnerable to panhandling scams.

This holiday season, community members are encouraged to “give good” by focusing their charitable donations on the local organizations that are best positioned to address these structural issues.

The Q&A below provides responses to frequently asked questions regarding panhandling. Don't see your question on the list? Please contact the City Manager's Office at 847.926.1000 or cityhp@cityhpil.com for more information.

Is panhandling legal?

In Illinois, panhandling is legal.

When can panhandling activities become illegal?

Asking for money in public places is legal in Illinois provided panhandlers remain off the roadway. It is not legal to panhandle in the roadway; this is dangerous for pedestrians and motorists/bicyclists alike.

In addition, panhandling is not permitted on private property. Residents and business owners may ask people who are panhandling to move to a public space. However, please note that the sidewalk is within the public right-of-way and is not considered private property of the adjacent home or business. If someone who is panhandling refuses to leave private property, please contact the public safety non-emergency line at 847.432.7730.

What are panhandling scams?

Panhandling scams occur when individuals fraudulently claim to be collecting donations on behalf of another person in need, such as a sick child or funeral costs. These scams have been reported in multiple

states, and can often appear convincing. The individuals purporting to be fundraising for a person in need may create signs, posters, or t-shirts using compelling photographs to make the scam seem more credible. To avoid these scams, individuals are strongly encouraged to give to established organizations that offer financial or medical assistance to those in need.

Has Highland Park offered social services and resource navigation assistance to individuals who are panhandling?

Yes, when the City has been made aware of individuals who are panhandling, Highland Park police officers have reached out to share information and offer to connect those individuals with available services in Highland Park and throughout Lake County. These services include:

- First point of contact with the Highland Park Police Department to determine whether City-provided social work resources may be appropriate. Social work services coordinated through the City include crime victims' support through the Police Department, senior services through the Highland Park Senior Center, and resiliency services via the Resiliency Division for individuals impacted by the Highland Park shooting.
- Referrals to PADS Lake County, for individuals experiencing homelessness
- Referrals to Moraine Township, for individuals experiencing food insecurity or emergency financial difficulty
- Referrals to [211 Lake County](#) (United Way of Lake County), for individuals who need assistance navigating the resources that may be available to them, including help with utilities, mental health, housing, health care, and more.

Although the City can offer to connect individuals to resources that may be helpful to them, they may choose not to accept this assistance, and are within their rights to continue panhandling.

How can I help individuals who are panhandling without giving them a cash donation?

There are several ways to support individuals in need:

- Advise the City if you observe people panhandling in Highland Park by calling the City Manager's Office at 847.926.1000. Your comment will be referred to the appropriate department for follow-up. Please note that the City will not be able to follow up with you further regarding the outcome of outreach to individuals who are panhandling.
- Make a donation to the [Moraine Township](#) Food Pantry or holiday giving programs.
- Reach out to the [Volunteer Pool of Highland Park](#) for local volunteer opportunities.

Have Highland Park police officers received any special training in social services?

As a certified One Mind Community, the Highland Park Police Department has invested in training to support its commitment to serving all community members in an effective and compassionate manner, especially those suffering from mental illness. Through the officer training, policy initiatives, and

community engagement efforts required for One Mind Community certification, One Mind Communities are well-positioned to support a wide range of needs. These requirements include:

- Mental Health First Aid training for all sworn and select non-sworn staff
- Crisis Intervention Training for all sworn officers with at least two years of service (a requirement to complete the training)
- Dementia-Friendly Community training, to support residents impacted by memory loss
- De-escalation training
- Embedded social work services, including a full-time social worker based at the Police Department, who assists officers and residents as appropriate with a variety of service calls
- Formal partnership with NorthShore Highland Park Hospital to support the law enforcement response to individuals in crisis
- Ongoing collaboration with sister governments and community service providers including Moraine and West Deerfield Townships, the Lake County State's Attorney's Office, the North Suburban Legal Aid Clinic, and United Way of Lake County

[Learn more about Highland Park's One Mind Community certification.](#)