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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 10, 2008

NEWS RELEASE

City of Atlanta, Atlanta Police Department and Private Sector Launch Panhandling Strategy to Educate, Enforce and Redirect Giving

Give Change That Makes Sense is the tagline of the three-tiered strategic campaign to address aggressive panhandling throughout the city of Atlanta with focus in the Downtown area, and it will launch today by Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB), the Mayor's office, the Atlanta Police Department (APD) and other public certified law enforcement jurisdictions with full participation of the private sector. The goal of this comprehensive campaign is to convince residents, employees, customers, students and visitors that giving money to panhandlers is not an authentic act of charity, and to make panhandlers aware that their actions are against the law. According to Greg Giornelli, City of Atlanta Chief Operating Officer, the strategy evolved from a public safety report recently completed by CAP and the ACVB,

which consequently resulted in rounds of meetings with city personnel, APD, and the private business owners and hospitality officials.

The strategy calls for:

- **Stepped-up enforcement/interaction/intervention** – At the public level (APD and other sworn police jurisdictions) and private level (private business security, hired off-duty police and the Downtown Ambassador Force)
- **Education/supply-demand management** – Urging visitors, conventioners, residents, students, and employees, through tailored information campaigns, that giving to panhandlers is counterproductive; and further, to educate the panhandlers that it is against the law to verbally solicit money in the “Downtown Tourist Triangle” and after dark throughout the City, as defined by the existing commercial solicitation ordinance
- **Directed giving/homeless services** – Coordination of convenient avenues where those who wish to give can do so efficiently by giving those in need directions to service providers who can assist

“We’re pleased that the Mayor’s office weighed-in on this approach,” says AJ Robinson, president of Central Atlanta Progress and the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District (ADID) that field the Downtown’s Ambassador Force®. The strategy has to have many levels of participation, from the public and private sectors, for it to work. It can’t just be an APD problem, because panhandling is happening on private property too, and that’s the responsibility of private business owners to help monitor. Aggressive panhandlers prey on everyone – visitors, conventioners, residents, employees and students. Along with stepped-up enforcement and monitoring, we’ll include an education component urging well-intentioned people to redirect their giving to provide services. That’s why we tested this strategy with [The International Woodworking Fair] in August to determine if we could actually affect the supply-demand side of the equation.”

Because of the large numbers of visitors that the city welcomes on a regular basis, one of the most important sectors to get behind this strategy is the hospitality industry in Downtown Atlanta. Spurgeon Richardson, president and CEO of ACVB, says, “The hospitality industry fully supports this strategy. Convention groups have told us that panhandling is damaging to their attendees experience and to our reputation, despite all of Atlanta’s assets. That feedback has the potential to affect the \$11.4 billion dollar in economic impact that this industry generates for the city each year.”

Robinson goes on to say, that “giving avenues” are identified to help channel funds to legitimate sources that provide actual services to those in need: “If people want to give, that’s great, but we’re asking them not to be part of funding a drug or alcohol habit. Fund something that helps people or as they say ‘give a

hand up' not a 'hand out". According to Robinson, the education portion is patterned after campaigns used in cities like Nashville whose campaign simply advised, 'Please Help. Don't give'.

Long term, according to Debi Starnes, the Mayor's policy advisor on homelessness, there are plans to install "giving meters" on the street similar to programs in a number of communities throughout the country as a way to direct funding to the provision of service rather than professional panhandlers. "The legislation is already in place. All that's left is the implementation," said Starnes. "This is a perfect time to consider a legitimate avenue for giving, if one is so inclined."

As part of the stepped-up enforcement efforts, the City's COMNET radio frequency (links the police and private businesses) will transition to "plain-talk" to report and monitor the movement of panhandlers on public and private areas. "If a hotel security officer sees panhandling on their private property, they will confront the panhandler, monitor their movements and report the description and direction of their travel so that they can be picked up by the next property owner, Ambassadors or the police," said David Wardell, CAP/ADID VP for Public Safety and Operations.

The *Give Change That Makes Sense* campaign will last through March 2009 and at that time, will be evaluated.

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