

Declaration of Cynthia Sue Stewart

I, Cynthia Stewart, do hereby declare:

1. I am 53 years old. I have lived in Grand Junction since 1999. Since I was in my twenties, I have had many periods of homelessness, including during much of my time living in Grand Junction.

2. I am disabled – I suffer from COPD, congestive heart failure, PTSD and bi-polar disorder.

3. I have had many jobs. Here in Grand Junction, I worked for Home Depot for six years; I worked for Target for two years; I worked for Comfort Keepers for eighteen months; and I worked for Walmart for eighteen months. Sometimes, these jobs paid too little for me to keep a roof over my head or pay all my bills. The last time I had a job was in 2010, which is when my mental illnesses were diagnosed and became more severe. I have been looking for work, but it is hard to find employment in this economy, particularly given my age and my disabilities.

4. When I am homeless, I try to stay in the shelter as much as possible at night. I am afraid to sleep on the streets or by the river, because I am concerned for my personal safety as a woman alone. The shelter costs \$2 per night. When I have not had money to sleep in the shelter or to pay for my prescriptions, I have often flown a sign on the sidewalk on North Avenue, including near the Walmart. My sign usually asks for help and explains what I need. For instance, I have held a sign that says: "Please help. Need Prescriptions. God Bless." Sometimes I have to fly a sign all day to get the \$2 I need to stay at the shelter.

5. I choose North Avenue to panhandle because I believe it has the most passersby of any street in Grand Junction, and it has many places to easily, safely, and legally pull out of traffic, park and interact. For instance, when I am standing on the sidewalk on North Avenue in front of Walmart and someone wants to give me a donation, they usually pull into the Walmart parking lot and then I can safely go to their car. I do not walk into the street to collect a donation. When people give me a little spare change – even it's only a few pennies, I feel great. I feel appreciative and it restores my faith in humanity.

6. Older people often have helped me out with a little spare change. I believe they may be a bit more compassionate because they have been through so much in their lives.

7. Several times a week, I travel to Mind Spring Health for appointments. I often take the bus to and from the appointments. If I am short on change for the bus, I ask people near the bus stop if they can spare a quarter or two. Many people, including disabled and elderly people who are often coming or going from Mind Springs Health, have helped me out with the change I needed to ride the bus.

8. I understand that the panhandling ban that just passed here in Grand Junction will make it illegal for me to fly my sign as I have flown it many times off and on since 1999. It would prohibit me from flying a sign on North Avenue. It would prohibit me from asking for spare change near a bus stop. I think this ban violates my constitutional right to communicate with people about my situation and to ask for help.

9. When I ask for help, I don't sit on private property. I don't block the sidewalk. There is plenty of room to pass by me. I don't block any entrance or exit to

any business. I make sure that I don't get in anyone's way. When I ask for a help with bus fare, I never touch the person I'm asking money from. I ask in a gentle, non-threatening manner. I don't ask anyone for money more than once and I don't get upset with people who don't give me money. I try to tell everyone who I ask for money – whether they give it to me or not – “God bless and have a good day.”

10. It truly pains me to have to ask for money. When I am out asking for money, I am at my humblest and most vulnerable. I am no threat to any one, and I do not believe people perceive me as a threat.

11. I don't think anyone has a duty or responsibility to give me money. It's a choice, and I appreciate when someone makes the choice to help me out.

12. Still, it is my experience that many people don't mind helping me out, and they often ask me my story and want to interact with me.

13. If not for the solicitation ban, I would continue to ask for help when I needed it on North Avenue and near bus stops. I currently am blessed to have housing and I am concerned that, if I am unable to ask for money when I need it, I will not be able to keep my housing.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

3-10-14

Date

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