



BUDGET CREATES OPPORTUNITY FOR COUNCIL LEADERSHIP ON BEGGING

Retail NZ says that the extra funding announced in yesterday's Budget for mental health services means that there's no longer any excuse for the City Council to tolerate begging on the streets of Wellington.

"Retail NZ has long called for a bylaw to stop begging on the street, with a sensible enforcement policy, but the Wellington City Council has refused to act because it doesn't want to be seen to demonise those who need mental health support," Greg Harford, Retail NZ's General Manager for Public Affairs said today.

"Many of those begging are reported to have mental health issues. It is right that the Council's first response should be to refer people to the appropriate social agencies - but Council also needs to take a stand on the issue and make it clear that beggars should seek support, and that there is no place on the streets for panhandlers. Social agencies supporting those with mental health issues received a significant increase in funding from yesterday's Budget, and should now be better placed to help deal with the issue.

"There are ongoing issues with begging on the streets of Wellington, and anecdotally there are greater numbers of beggars acting aggressively towards the public. This creates an unsavoury downtown environment, and is adversely affecting both retailers and customers. It's time for the Council to show some leadership and now look to put in place a bylaw to make it clear that begging is not acceptable on the streets of Wellington."

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