

Police Chief: Give Homeless Bus Ticket Out Of Town

ACLU Supports Idea

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DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. -- The city's police chief wants to give free bus tickets to the homeless so they can find housing with out-of-town family and friends and get help with problems such as mental illness.

It is Chief Michael Chitwood's latest proposal to deal with the homeless population he thinks has given the beachside city a bad image. Earlier in the year he instructed police officers to arrest the homeless for petty crimes such as trespassing and panhandling to push them into getting help from social-service agencies.

Chitwood thinks the bus-ticket idea will help the homeless and reduce their local population of 2,600.

"I will do everything humanly possible to help somebody who is out on their luck," Chitwood said.

Other communities, including several in South Florida, have tried giving the homeless bus trips. Some advocates say it's a waste of time, while others think it's working.

The American Civil Liberties Union supports Chitwood's idea.

"It's a positive," said Central Florida chapter head George Crossley, who has opposed Orlando's razing of two homeless camps and banning of feedings of the homeless in certain areas. "At least it gives a person the option of being back with friends and family."

Critics of Chitwood's proposal say he needs to learn more about the homeless before offering solutions.

About 73 percent of Volusia and Flagler counties' homeless wouldn't need to leave town because they are originally from the area, said Lindsay Roberts, executive director of the Volusia-Flagler County Coalition for the Homeless. Plus, most homeless don't have family or friends willing to take them in, which is why they end up on the streets, she said.