

**Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia
Statement on Anti-Islamic Advertising Campaign**



The Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia was founded in 2004 to build trust, understanding and cooperation among faith communities to work together for the good of this region. Our initiatives equip people in schools, workplaces, congregations and neighborhoods to become places where difference is respected, not denigrated.

Sometimes events in the headlines galvanize our efforts. When SEPTA was approached this fall to run an anti-Islamic ad campaign, it sent shivers across our region. The Interfaith Center reached out to key faith and civic partners and convened a Strategy Coalition of more than 20 groups to respond together. We imagined Muslim children boarding buses to school and everyday citizens of all faiths and cultures wondering why our buses would carry hurtful and accusatory messages. We are proud that SEPTA tried very hard to prevent this.

Over the last several months, we met with school district and government officials, law enforcement, human relations professionals, religious and community leaders and youth of all backgrounds to discuss this proposed ad campaign. We heard again and again, “This is not right; this is not Philadelphia.”

The Interfaith Center and our nearly 20 Coalition partners stand today with SEPTA to commend its courageous efforts to protect the welfare and dignity of its ridership. Every day, more than a million citizens across the Philadelphia area rely upon SEPTA to maintain safe and peaceful transit to places of work, school, culture, and worship. Trains and buses pulse with the vibrancy of our region’s broad and beautiful diversity. We take this for granted, until something happens to shake this up.

While we treasure and fight for the right of free speech, we decry those who want to use this sacred privilege to incite hatred and prejudice.

We can do better than that. We in Philadelphia want to construct bridges of understanding. The Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia and our coalition partners want to use this moment to educate and engage more and more people in this enterprise. We want to vigorously display the many ways we work together peacefully day in and day out. We want to paint the city with images of the richness, beauty, peace and light that emanates from all.

We invite the citizens of our region to join us in this *Dare to understand* campaign.

To learn more, please visit our website at daretounderstand.org.

We invite the community to join us in recognizing SEPTA at our annual *Dare to Understand* Benefit on the evening of April 29th. We will be honoring SEPTA for its bold leadership in standing up to respect and protect the dignity of the diverse population of our region. General Counsel, Gino Benedetti, will accept the award on SEPTA’s behalf.

The Very Reverend Judith Sullivan
Board Chair

Abby Stamelman Hocky
Executive Director