

**Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia
Statement on Anti-Islamic Advertising Campaign
Adopted on October 14, 2014; Updated March 27, 2015**



In September, a New Hampshire-based group known as “The American Freedom Defense Initiative” (AFDI) sought to purchase advertising space on SEPTA as part of a campaign that AFDI has pursued in transit systems in several major cities across the country, including New York City, Washington, and San Francisco. SEPTA declined, due to the derogatory and hurtful nature of the messages. On March 11, 2015 the courts ruled that SEPTA must accept the ads. The four-week ad run is expected to begin on 84 SEPTA buses the first week in April.

While we affirm the constitutional protection of free speech, that does not diminish our condemnation of irresponsible speech. The language used in these proposed advertisements is distorted, prejudicial, and inflames hatred.

It was our hope as religious leaders that hate-filled messages would not be carried throughout the neighborhoods of Philadelphia on the sides of SEPTA buses, trolleys, and subways. We condemn inflammatory messages that serve to divide, stigmatize, and incite prejudice. We will continue to reject attempts to stereotype any tradition or community. Working as spiritual leaders and working with the members of the diverse faith and ethnic communities within Philadelphia, our challenge and our hope is to strengthen the ties among all communities to improve the quality of life.

The Religious Leaders Council calls on the greater Philadelphia community to join us in opposing intolerance and building trust and understanding.

The Religious Leaders Council, founded and staffed by the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia, represents more than 30 religious traditions and denominations within our community. It is led by Co-Conveners Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Rabbi David Straus, Imam Anwar Muhaimin and Bishop Claire Schenot Burkat.

The Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia

Co-Conveners:

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput - Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Bishop Claire Schenot Burkat - Southeastern PA Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
Imam Anwar Muhaimin - Quba Masjid
Rabbi David Straus - Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Phila.

Members:

Rabbi David Ackerman - Rabbinical Assembly, Philadelphia Region
Lt. Colonels Janet & Stephen Banfield - Salvation Army of Eastern Pennsylvania & Delaware
Rev. Luis A. Cortés, Jr. - Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia & Vicinity
Bishop Clifton Daniel - Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania
Christie Duncan-Tessmer - Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell - Delaware Valley Association of Reform Rabbis
Dr. Gity Etemad - Philadelphia Baha'i Community
Rabbi Albert E. Gabbai - Congregation Mikveh Israel
Rabbi Elisa Goldberg - Philadelphia Board of Rabbis
Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr. - Philadelphia Leadership Foundation
Rev. Terrence D. Griffith - Black Clergy of Philadelphia & Vicinity
Fr. Steve Hutnick - Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
Bishop Peter Hwang - Council of Korean Churches of Greater Philadelphia
Bishop Gregory G.M. Ingram - African Methodist Episcopal Church
Bishop Peggy Johnson - Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, The United Methodist Church
President Bokin Kim - Won Institute of Graduate Studies
Elder Milan Kunz - The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints
Rev. Steven B. Lawrence - Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia
Rabbi Danielle LeShaw - Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Imam Muhammad Abdur-Razzaq Miller - Mosque of Shaikh M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen
Father Mina Mina - St Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church
Father Emmanuel Pratsinakis - Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey
Rev. David Pyle - Joseph Priestley District, Unitarian Universalist Association
Imam Asim Abdur-Rashid - Majlis Ash-Shura of Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley
Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace - Presbytery of Philadelphia, Presbyterian Church USA
Imam Mohamed Shehata - Al-Aqsa Islamic Society
Archbishop Stefan Soroka – Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia
Rev. William Paul Worley - PA Southeast Conference, United Church of Christ
In Formation