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SEPTA Will Not Appeal Recent Ruling Regarding Controversial Ads

AFDI Ads May Run on Buses as Early as Next Week

PHILADELPHIA, PA (March 26, 2015) – A federal court judge presiding over a dispute between SEPTA and a group seeking to purchase advertising space on SEPTA vehicles has ruled that SEPTA must accept the ads, even if they contain messages that may be disparaging to riders and SEPTA employees. After careful consideration, SEPTA has decided not to appeal this ruling. Our policy was revised in October 2014 to allow the Authority to reject these types of ads without violating the First Amendment. However, this policy change was made after the American Freedom Defense Initiative's (AFDI) initial request to purchase advertising space and is not applicable in the matter.

Consequently, AFDI has executed a contact with SEPTA's advertising management agency, Titan, to purchase advertising space on the side panel of 84 SEPTA buses. The ads will contain what some may view as anti-Muslim messages. These vehicles will be placed in normal inventory rotation throughout the SEPTA service area. The ads will begin appearing on vehicles during the first week of April for a four-week period.

"We understand that our decision to not file an appeal will be disappointing to those who will be forced to view the disparaging ads," said SEPTA General Manager Joseph M. Casey. "We are aware that the presence of the ads could anger the public, but caution that attempts to vandalize the ads or deface SEPTA vehicles will not be tolerated."

Abby Stamelman Hocky, Executive Director of the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia said, "Ads like these violate our values, even if the judge ruled they do not violate the law. We applaud SEPTA for its efforts to restrict the placement of the controversial ads." The Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia has chosen SEPTA as a co-recipient of its annual "Dare to Understand" award, to be presented April 29, at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University.

SEPTA regrets any discomfort that may be caused from viewing these controversial messages during the weeks they will be displayed. Those who wish to comment or voice their concerns may do so by completing a SEPTA Customer Service comment form at www3.septa.org/customerservice/.