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Seattle Area Transit Authority Refuses to Run Anti-Terrorism Advertisement for Fear of Offending Muslims; Federal Lawsuit Filed

Seattle, Washington (October 8, 2013) — Late yesterday, the American Freedom Law Center (AFLC), a national, nonprofit Judeo-Christian law firm, filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against King County, Washington, for refusing to run an anti-terrorism advertisement that displayed photographs of global terrorists from the FBI’s most wanted list. The lawsuit was filed in the United States District Court for the Western District of Washington at Seattle on behalf of the advertisement’s sponsors, the American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI) and its co-founders, Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer.

In June of this year, King County displayed an advertisement submitted by the federal government that depicted the “Faces of Global Terrorism” in an effort to “stop a terrorist” and “save lives.” The advertisement offered “up to \$25 million reward” for helping to capture one of the FBI’s most wanted terrorists. The advertisement appeared as follows:



The terrorists identified in the advertisement are also found on the FBI’s most wanted global terrorist list, which is posted on the FBI’s website. This list includes pictures and “wanted posters” for thirty-two terrorists. Not surprisingly, of the thirty-two listed terrorists, thirty are individuals with Muslim names and/or are wanted for terrorism related to organizations conducting terrorist acts in the name of Islam.

Despite these facts, the federal government decided to terminate its “Faces of Global Terrorism” advertisement campaign after receiving complaints from politicians and advocacy groups that the list of wanted global terrorists pictured in the advertisement appeared to include mostly Muslim terrorists.

Appalled at the government’s decision to pull this important message from the public square, on July 30, Geller and Spencer, on behalf of AFDI, submitted an advertisement to King County that included the same pictures, names, and message as the government’s advertisement. The AFDI advertisement appears as follows:



David Yerushalmi, AFLC Co-Founder and Senior Counsel, commented: “Our government’s incessant desire to appease Islamic terrorist apologists like the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Hamas-Muslim Brotherhood front group operating here in the United States with impunity, is literally placing all American citizens at serious risk. Consequently, if the government won’t identify our enemy, we will make certain our clients can.”

Despite having previously accepted the federal government’s “Faces of Global Terrorism” advertisement, on August 15, King County rejected AFDI’s advertisement, claiming that it contains (1) “material that is or that the sponsor reasonably should have known is false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive or would constitute a tort of defamation or invasion of privacy”; (2) “material that demeans or disparages an individual, group of individuals or entity”; and (3) “material that is so objectionable as to be reasonably foreseeable that it will result in harm to, disruption of or interference with the transportation system” in violation of the County’s Transit Advertising Policy.

As a result of this decision, AFLC filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against King County, alleging that the County violated the First Amendment free speech rights of AFDI, Geller, and Spencer; that the County violated the equal protection guarantee of the Fourteenth Amendment by denying AFDI, Geller, and Spencer access to a forum for their speech based on the content

and viewpoint of their message; and that the County violated the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment in that the County's speech restriction is unconstitutionally vague and it grants government officials unbridled discretion to restrict speech that they dislike.

AFLC Co-Founder and Senior Counsel Robert Muise commented: "King County's prior restraint on our client's speech is not only wrongheaded, it is clearly unconstitutional. Under the First Amendment, the government is not permitted to impose special prohibitions on speakers who express views on disfavored subjects or on the basis of hostility towards the messenger or the underlying message expressed."

Yerushalmi added: "It is quite evident based on the fact that King County initially accepted the federal government's advertisement only to have the feds pull the ad for fear of offending Muslims that King County is now suffering from the quite debilitating disease of political correctness. And there is little doubt that King County officials also dislike the messenger—our clients—who are doing a great service by alerting all Americans to the dangers of sharia and its followers."

AFLC intends to promptly file a motion for a preliminary injunction, asking the court to enter an order permitting the immediate display of the AFDI advertisement.

The *American Freedom Law Center* is a Judeo-Christian law firm that fights for faith and freedom. It accomplishes its mission through litigation, public policy initiatives, and related activities. It does not charge for its services. The Law Center is supported by contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations, and is recognized by the IRS as a section 501(c)(3) organization. Visit us at www.americanfreedomlawcenter.org.

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