

January 19, 2011

FOR RELEASE

SKELLENGER BENDER JOINS A.C.L.U IN LAWSUIT TO UPHOLD RIGHTS OF FREE SPEECH ON BUS ADS

The law firm of Skellenger Bender, together with the ACLU of Washington, today filed an action in U.S. District Court, Seattle, seeking an order to direct King County to honor its original commitment to display a particular advertisement on its buses. The lawsuit, filed on behalf of the Seattle Mideast Awareness Campaign (SeaMAC), seeks a preliminary injunction to uphold the Awareness Campaign's free speech rights to publish a paid bus ad expressing its views on actions of the Israeli government.

SeaMAC, a nonprofit grassroots organization that seeks to educate the public about U.S. policy related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, intended to place a paid advertisement on the outside of King County Metro buses. The ad's text read "Israeli War Crimes: Your Tax Dollars at Work." SeaMAC submitted the ad on October 15, 2010, to Titan Outdoor LLC, the company that handles Metro bus advertising, which on November 10 informed SeaMAC that the ad had been approved and accepted for placement on selected buses.

Official ACLU sources reported that SeaMAC signed a contract on December 13 to run the ad, and paid Titan the following day. SeaMAC then paid for printing of the ad, which was delivered to King County on December 17 and scheduled to run on 12 metro buses for four weeks beginning December 27. According to the ACLU, the prospect of displaying the ad generated an outpouring of strong opposition and, on December 23, King County issued a press release announcing that the county now would not permit the ad to run. Later the same day, Titan formally notified SeaMAC that the previously accepted ad had been cancelled.

"In a free and democratic society, we cannot allow the government to suppress lawful speech, even speech that may stir emotions," said Kathleen Taylor, executive director of ACLU of Washington. "Chipping away at fundamental free speech rights is not the answer."

Skellenger Bender lawyer Jeffrey Grant, a member of the ACLU of Washington Legal Committee, will serve as cooperating attorney with ACLU staff attorneys Sara Dunne and Lindsey Soffes.

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