

MTA RULES DESERVE PUBLIC SUPPORT

Tomorrow, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) will vote on advertising standards that are designed to service the public interest. The standards would bar advertisement on public transportation that a) are considered violent b) are frightening to children c) demean groups of people d) contain images of minors in a sexual pose e) promote escort or dating services and f) are patently offensive.

The MTA standards are a response to two protests launched by the Catholic League. In 1993, the Catholic League protested a VH-1 ad on buses that contrasted Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with the pop star, Madonna. In 1995, the MTA allowed the placement of Calvin Klein “kiddie porn” jean ads. Both ads were pulled after the league mounted a public protest.

William Donohue outlined the league’s position:

“It is currently impossible to advertise tobacco on New York City buses, but not kiddie porn. All that these new MTA standards do is reflect the will of the public to prohibit government agencies from trafficking in smut and defamatory images of whole segments of the population. What the MTA is doing is entirely within the law: commercial speech does not enjoy the same protection that political discourse does. And that is why places like Washington, D.C. have been able to live with rules that are much tighter than we have in New York.

“The First Amendment is not absolute: it is conditioned on time, place and manner. While the government should not restrain the display of Nazi symbols or vulgar pictures in art galleries, it is under no obligation to allow them on the sides of buses where motorists, stuck in traffic, have no

choice but to view them.

“Those who say that the MTA rules are too vague are unpersuasive. The laws on sexual harassment couldn’t be more vague, yet the very persons who criticize the MTA rules find no problem with these laws. It is time for the MTA to ratify the public will and adopt new standards.”