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Victory on Stopping Bus Bench Alcohol Ads in Los Angeles

Coalition to Ban Alcohol Ads from Public Property Rallies in Los Angeles to Persuade Board of Public Works

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (June 10, 2011) – The Coalition to Ban Alcohol Ads from Public Property organized a lively grassroots rally in Los Angeles City Hall Plaza this morning to send a message to the L.A. Board of Public Works that promoting alcohol on city-owned bus benches was a really bad idea. The Board heard the concerns and agreed by asking for a full ban on all alcohol ads in the new contract. The contractor, Martin Outdoor Media, LLC quickly agreed. ***There will be no alcohol ads on 6,000 L.A. city-owned bus benches.*** This will reduce youth exposure to messages that are feeding an epidemic of underage alcohol consumption and harm.

“The City of Los Angeles has a responsibility to its citizens to not provide a venue for advertising of alcohol on property owned by the citizenry,” said John O. Whitaker, Jr., CATC, A.W.A.R.E./Tarzana Treatment Centers. *“Children should never be exposed to alcohol advertising. For most addicts, alcohol was their first mind-altering substance and it is known to be a gateway drug to the rest. The earlier the exposure to alcohol advertising, the earlier addicts or potential addicts are likely to drink and then use. Banning alcohol ads on city-owned property is a fantastic step in the right direction.”*

The Los Angeles Department of Public Health recently recommended that "reducing alcohol advertising in public spaces and in areas commonly seen by minors," would help discourage underage drinking. Yet the originally proposed 10-year bus bench contract with Martin Outdoor Media inexplicably allowed the company to place alcohol ads on public property.

“The banning of alcohol ads is not about contracts and profits or freedom of speech. Alcohol, a toxic and poisonous substance that has been shown to cause disease and death due to health problems, should not be advertised in public view,” stated Ruben Rodriguez, executive director Pueblo y Salud. *“The City of LA has the responsibility and the right to protect the health and safety of its residents. We call upon the City to ban all alcohol advertising on City-owned property.”*

L.A. is plagued by over \$10.8 billion in alcohol-related harm every year. More than 2.3 million underage youth drink alcohol each year in California. Underage drinking costs the state a staggering \$7.3 billion annually. Youth violence, crime, car crashes, and high-risk sex are the most noticeable results.

“Throughout this country there are laws to protect the safety of our youth, including making sure that the youth that use public transportation on a daily basis, are not exposed to this type of advertising,” said Hugo Pacheco, Community Leadership Coalition. *“Yet local politicians, unwilling to take the necessary steps to eliminate non-essential spending, are hoping to gain additional revenue by selling off advertising rights to previously protected public property venues. Ultimately the taxpayers will have to pay the exorbitant costs associated with curing the negative results of those who have been influenced to touch the products.”*

By acknowledging the research-based data on the dangers of exposing youth to alcohol-ads, and calling for a full ban, the Board of Public Works decision will now move the contract to the Mayor and City Council for final approval.

“The Los Angeles MTA does not allow any alcohol advertising on its buses, trains and other transit facilities,” said Jorge Castillo, advocacy and outreach organizer from Marin Institute. “We thank the Board of Public Works and Martin Outdoor Media for reaching this similar agreement. Now we will focus on persuading the Los Angeles City Council and the Mayor to also adopt this wise policy, and approve the Martin Outdoor Media contract with a full prohibition on any alcohol ads on city-owned bus benches.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO: <http://noalcoholads.org/> and www.marininstitute.org