



Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

c/o Judge Baker Children's Center
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November 20, 2006

Mr. Daniel Grabauskas
General Manager, MBTA
10 Park Plaza, Suite 3910
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Mr. Grabauskas:

CCFC
STEERING COMMITTEE:

Enola Aird, JD

Kathy Bowman

Allen Kanner, PhD

Joe Kelly

Velma LaPoint, PhD

Diane Levin, PhD

Jane Levine, EdD

Karen Lewis

Susan Linn, EdD, Chair

Alvin F. Poussaint, MD

We are writing to urge you to immediately remove all advertisements for the video game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* (Rockstar Games, 2006) from MBTA trains. These ads are currently covering the outside of many of the trains on the Green Line. At a time of escalating concerns about youth violence in the Boston area, it is unconscionable that the MBTA would feature advertising for a violent video game.

Because they feature graphic violence and explicit sexual behavior, the video game industry consistently rates the *Grand Theft Auto* series as being unsuitable for children under the age of 17. Despite this rating, these video games are frequently advertised in venues frequented by children. Advertising on the MBTA enables Rockstar games to reach countless children—those who ride the trains and those whose neighborhoods the trains pass through.

The *Grand Theft Auto* series has proven to be extremely popular with young people. In 2002, the top selling video game for teens and preteens was *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, in which players could kill a prostitute after having sex with her.¹ In *Vice City Stories*, the latest installment in the series, players can kill rival gang members, law enforcement, and innocent bystanders as they attempt to set up their own illicit businesses, such as drug dealing, and commit armed robbery.

At the 2006 Summit on Video Games, Youth and Public Policy, academic, medical and health experts signed a statement saying: “Behavioral science research demonstrates that playing violent video games can increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior in children and youth.”² The most recent studies employing state-of-the-art neuroimaging techniques support the behavioral research.³ After reviewing 1000 studies over 30 years of research, a consortium of the major American public health organizations concluded that “viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children.”⁴ There is evidence that violent video games can engender more aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and decrease empathetic, helpful behaviors with peers.⁵



It is both cynical and irresponsible for the MBTA to advertise a violent video game at a time of increased concerns about youth violence in Boston. As you are surely aware, shootings are up 21 percent and homicides are up 12 percent this year over last year's already high levels.⁶ And promoting such violent video games undermines the MBTA's own efforts to address youth violence, such as its special bus that memorializes young victims of youth violence.⁷

We urge you to:

1. Immediately remove all advertisements for *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* from MBTA property; and
2. Publicly pledge that the MBTA will not take advertisements for video games that the media industry deems unsuitable for children under the age of 17.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor of Boston

Kenneth E. Reeves, Mayor of Cambridge

Jarret Barrios, State Senator

Diane Wilkerson, State Senator, 2nd Suffolk District

Ruth B. Balser, State Representative, 12th Middlesex District

Will Brownsberger, State Representative-Elect, 24th Middlesex District

Kay Khan, State Representative, 11th Middlesex District

Peter J. Koutoujian, State Representative, 10th Middlesex District; Chairman, Joint Committee on Public Health

Eugene L. O'Flaherty, State Representative, 2nd Suffolk District

Shirley Owens-Hicks, State Representative, 6th Suffolk District; Chairwoman of the House Committee on Children and Families

Anne Paulsen, State Representative, 24th Middlesex District

Jeffrey Sanchez, State Representative, 15th Suffolk District

Frank Smizik, State Representative, 15th Norfolk District

Alice Wolf, State Representative, 25th Middlesex District

Timothy Toomey, State Representative, 26th Middlesex District; Vice-Mayor, Cambridge

Michael P. Ross, Boston City Council

Marjorie Decker, Cambridge City Council

Anthony D. Galluccio, Cambridge City Council

Craig Kelly, Cambridge City Council

Denise Simmons, Cambridge City Council

Reverend Ray A. Hammond, MD, MA, Co-Pastor, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church; Chairman and Co-Founder of the Boston Ten Point Coalition

Reverend Jeffery Brown, Union Baptist Church Cambridge; Boston Ten Point Coalition

Minister B. Christopher Sumner, Executive Director, Boston Ten Point Coalition

Gerald P. Koocher, PhD, Dean, Simmons College School for Health Studies; President, American Psychological Association

William R. Beardslee, MD, Gardner/Monks Professor of Child Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; Academic Chair, Children's Hospital Boston

Tristram Blake, Executive Director, South End Community Health Center

John Weisz, PhD, ABPP, President, Judge Baker Children's Center

Alvin F. Poussaint, MD, Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School and Judge Baker Children's Center

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, MD, Professor of Public Health Practice and Associate Dean, Harvard School of Public Health

Howard Spivak, MD, Director, Tufts University Center for Children; Vice President, Community Health Programs, Tufts-New England Medical Center

David Elkind, PhD, Professor of Child Development, Tufts University; Author, *The Hurried Child*

Ashley C. McCumber, President, United South End Settlements

Michael Rich, MD, MPH, Director, Center on Media and Child Health, Children's Hospital Boston; Harvard Medical School; Harvard School of Public Health

Jonathan Scott, President and CEO, Victory Programs

Bryan Van Dorpe, Executive Director, South Boston Neighborhood House

Boston Common Asset Management

Steven Brion-Meisels, National Board, Peace Action

Nancy Carlsson-Paige, EdD, Professor of Education, Lesley University
 Gail Dines, PhD, Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies, Wheelock College
 Ann Donner, Ann Donner Consulting
 Cindy Diggs, Founder, Peace Boston 2006
 Shirley Fan, Executive Director, Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
 Shelagh Foreman, Director, Massachusetts Peace Action
 The Greater Boston Center for Healthy Communities
 Sarah Hamilton, President, Longwood Medical Area Child Care Center
 Mariama White-Hammond, Project HIP-HOP
 Amy Hendrickson, Brookline Peaceworks
 Kevin Hepner, Vice President, Judge Baker Children's Center
 Joe Kelly, President, Dads and Daughters
 Jean Kilbourne, EdD, Visiting Research Scholar, Wellesley Centers for Women; Author, *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*
 Susan Linn, EdD, co-founder, Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Judge Baker Children's Center; Author, *Consuming Kids*
 Susan W. Lees, United for Justice with Peace Coalition
 Diane Levin, PhD, Professor of Education, Wheelock College; Author, *Remote Control Childhood*
 Adela Margules, Executive Director, Bowdoin Street Health Center
 The Massachusetts Banding Together Against Alcohol-Advertising (MBTAA) Collaborative
 Marc McGovern, Director of Family Support and Stabilization, Cambridge Family & Children's Service
 Mary Minott, LICSW, Coordinator, Brookline Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention Program, a Division of the Brookline Public Health Department.
 Missionary Franciscan Sisters, Newton
 Shari Nethersole, MD, Medical Director for Community Health, Children's Hospital Boston
 Suzanne H. Pasch, PhD, Vice President for Academic Affairs/Provost, Wheelock College
 Juliet B. Schor, PhD, Professor of Sociology, Boston College; Author, *Born to Buy*
 Sisters of Saint Joseph, Boston
 Vicky Steinitz & Eleanor Duckworth, co-coordinators, Cambridge United for Justice with Peace
 Martha Vibbert, Ph.D., Director, SPARK Center, Boston Medical Center; Boston University School of Medicine
 Charles Wibiralske, Associate Director for Community and Economic Development Programs, Episcopal City Mission
 Darcie-Nicole Wicknick, Co-Founder/Managing Director of The Boston Hip-Hop Alliance

¹ Snider, M. (2002). Video Games: Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. *USA Today*, 27 December, 8D.

² Consensus statement from the Institute for Media and the Family's 2006 Summit on Video Games, Youth, and Public Policy. <http://www.mediafamily.org/press/20061031.shtml>.

³ Anderson, D.R. et al (2006). Brain Imaging—An Introduction to a New Approach to Studying Media Processes and Effects. *Media Psychology*, 8, 1-6.

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics (2000). Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children, July 26. www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jstmtevc.htm.

⁵ Anderson, C.A. (2004). An update on the effects of violent video games. *Journal of Adolescence* 27, 113-122. Gentile, D. A. & Anderson, C. A. (2003). Violent video games: The newest media violence hazard. In D. A. Gentile (Ed.), *Media violence and children*. (p131-152). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing.

⁶ http://cbs4boston.com/topstories/local_story_287223225.html

⁷ Viser, M. (2006, Oct. 25). Grief given crosstown route. *Boston Globe*.
http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2006/10/25/grief_given_crosstown_route/