

NEWS RELEASE

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Criminal Justice Experts Ask Companies Not to Put Ads on Police Cars

Commercial Alert and twenty criminal justice experts sent letters today to CEOs of the 100 leading national advertisers, asking them not to buy ads on police cars. The letters say that the ads turn police cars into “rolling billboards,” make police “objects of ridicule and scorn” and “may invite crime, by reducing the moral authority of the police.”

According to news reports, twelve cities have agreed to purchase police cruisers with ads, and another 75 cities are considering it. Pictures of the sponsored police cars are at <http://www.governmentacquisitions.com>.

The letter to the CEOs of the 100 leading national advertisers follows.

Dear -----:

In these days of violence and unrest, respect for law has become a precious civic asset, and that includes respect for those who enforce the law. It is imperative that we resist all that would cheapen or degrade the men and women who maintain order in our communities, or would make them objects of ridicule and contempt.

For this reason we urge that you not participate in a scheme to put advertising on local police cars, promoted by a company called Government Acquisitions LLC. There are many, many venues for advertising in America today. This is one of the worst.

Government Acquisitions is taking advantage of the budget shortfalls facing local governments in order to turn police cars into rolling billboards. The company sells the ad space, and then sells the cars to police departments for a dollar each. According to the *Washington Post*, about 75 cities and towns are talking with the company about buying the sponsored police cruisers. The *Christian Science Monitor* reports that twelve towns have agreed to purchase them already.

It is understandable that some police departments would succumb to this temptation. Many of them need money, and the nation's politicians have not provided it. But dependence on corporate advertising simply delays the day of fiscal reckoning. Besides, the answer to the budget problems of local police forces is not to turn their cars -- the most visible police presence in most communities -- into pitchmobiles, and officers themselves into hucksters on wheels. Does anyone really think it is going to increase respect for law, to have police men and women in their cars hawking cola and fries?

The rule of law depends on the impartiality of our nation's system of law enforcement. That impartiality is compromised when police officers act as marketing agents for corporations. The Government Acquisitions police cars can easily lead to conflicts of interest when police take action that affects their advertisers. For example, a police officer may be inclined to “go easy” on a local business whose ads are on the police department's cars.

Our nation's police departments need neither conflicts of interest nor farce, either now or any other time. In the long run, both may invite crime, by reducing the moral authority of the police.

We urge that you not aid this scheme. There are better ways to support the local police -- ways that honor law enforcement officials rather than turning them into objects of ridicule and scorn.

Sincerely,

Albert W. Alschuler, Wilson-Dickinson Professor of Law, University of Chicago Law School

Peter Barnes, Co-founder, Working Assets; author, *Who Owns the Sky?*

Adam Benedetto, Candidate for Sheriff of Dane County, Madison WI

David Bollier, author, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of our Common Wealth*

David Bosworth, Associate Professor of English, University of Washington

Jason Catlett, President, Junkbusters Corp.

Paul G. Chevigny, Joel S. and Anne B. Ehrenkranz Professor of Law, New York University Law School, author of *Police Power* and *Cops and Rebels*

Tom Cook, Professor of Criminal Justice, Wayne State College, Nebraska

Christopher C. Cooper, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice, Saint Xavier University

Marilyn Corsianos, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology, Eastern Michigan University

Adrienne D. Davis, Professor of Law, University of North Carolina School of Law

Mike Feinstein, Mayor, City of Santa Monica

Ruth E. Fleury-Steiner, Assistant Professor, Department of Individual and Family Studies, University of Delaware

Monroe H. Freedman, Lichtenstein Distinguished Professor of Legal Ethics, Hofstra Law School

Craig B. Futterman, Assistant Clinical Professor of Law, University of Chicago Law School

John J. Gibbs, Professor of Criminology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Jona Goldschmidt, Associate Professor, Department of Criminal Justice, Loyola University

Matt Gonzalez, Member, San Francisco Board of Supervisors

Nancy A. Horton, Assistant Professor, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Maryland Eastern Shore

Michael Jacobson, co-author, *Marketing Madness*

Sut Jhally, Founder and Executive Director, The Media Education Foundation

Jean Kilbourne, Author, *Can't Buy Me Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think And Feel*

Alan J. Lizotte, Professor, School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany

Arthur J. Lurigio, Professor of Criminal Justice, Loyola University

Ben Manski, Co-Chair, Green Party of the United States

Randy Martin, Professor, Department of Criminology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Robert McChesney, Research Professor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; author, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*

Bob McCannon, Executive Director, New Mexico Media Literacy Project

Jim Metrock, President, Obligation, Inc.

Mark Crispin Miller, Professor of Media Ecology, New York University

Norval Morris, Julius Kreeger Professor of Law and Criminology, Emeritus, University of Chicago Law School

Robert Pugsley, Paul E. Treusch Professor of Law, Southwestern University School of Law

Cliff Roberson, Professor of Criminal Justice, Washburn University

Dennis Rosenbaum, Professor of Criminal Justice and Psychology, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Illinois at Chicago
Gary Ruskin, Executive Director, Commercial Alert; Director, Congressional Accountability Project
Ron Tannehill, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, Washburn University
Sandra Wachholz, Professor of Criminology, University of Southern Maine
Robert Weissman, co-director, Essential Action

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