

November 20, 2006

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

Dear Mr. Grabauskas:

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
Kay Kahn, 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 Paulson, State Representative, 24th Middlesex 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, Boston Children's Hospital
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
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
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

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*
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.
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*
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
