



Press Release

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Contact: Lacey McNiel, media@firstliberty.org

Direct: 972-941-4453

D.C. Metro to Archdiocese: You Can't Ride Our Bus

First Liberty Institute files brief defending a church's right to express its beliefs in public

WASHINGTON, DC—First Liberty Institute and the Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC), represented by Steptoe & Johnson, LLP, filed a friend-of-the-court [brief](#) in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia supporting the Archdiocese of Washington's complaint against the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Before Christmas, WMATA banned an advertisement from the Archdiocese of Washington depicting images of shepherds and the URL "FindThePerfectGift.org" on its metro trains and buses. The brief argues WMATA violated the U.S. Constitution.

"WMATA prohibited the Archdiocese's advertisement not because it referred to Christmas, but because it sought to convey a religious viewpoint message emphasizing that Christ is the reason for the season," said Kelly Shackelford, President, CEO, and Chief Counsel to First Liberty. "What's really shocking is that WMATA in this case said there were 'two halves' of Christmas, the religious half and the secular half. But only messages relating to the 'secular half' were welcome on their buses. Evidently, WMATA can now accept Christmas advertisements about Santa Clause, but rejects the nativity; it accepts the three French hens, but not three wise men."

WMATA changed its advertising [guidelines](#) in 2015 to prohibit ads promoting religious or political beliefs. The guidelines state: "Advertisements that promote or oppose any religion, religious practice or belief are prohibited."

"When the government rejects a message just because it conveys a religious point of view, it violates the First Amendment," Shackelford says. "Censoring *all* religious viewpoints should be an obvious violation of the First Amendment."

Read the entire brief [here](#).

EPPC is a nonprofit research institution dedicated to defending American ideals and to applying the Judeo-Christian moral tradition to critical issues of public policy. First Liberty is a nonprofit legal organization dedicated to defending religious liberty for all Americans.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

To arrange an interview, contact Lacey McNiel at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.