

'Gone too far' anti-abortion signs rejected

ADS 'DECEPTIVE'

Group behind campaign calls decision 'bizarre'

BY ADRIAN HUMPHREYS

An advertising campaign by LifeCanada, marking the 20th anniversary of the Supreme Court of Canada's decriminalization of abortion by asking if Canada has "gone too far," has been rejected by Advertising Standards Canada.

The billboard campaign, erected in dozens of communities, featured a picture of a pregnant woman with an ultrasound image superimposed over her rounded belly and the words: "Nine months. The length of time abortion is allowed in Canada. Abortion: Have we gone too far?"

After three complaints were filed with the advertising industry's self-regulatory body, a panel deemed the advertisement to be "deceptive."

"The impression conveyed by your out-of-home

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Who is
decision, ASC
is playing a
censorship role

advertisement," Advertising Standards Canada says in a letter to LifeCanada informing it of the decision, "is that abortions may be had at the asking at any time throughout the nine months of pregnancy."

In that, the panel concluded the advertisement "amounts to a deceptive representation," according to the letter.

"Since the advertising was totally silent on substantive, non-legal constraints and limitations that are, in fact and practice, imposed by medical practitioners and hospitals on securing pro-

professionally authorized and administered abortions in the more advanced stages of pregnancy, the advertising contravenes ... the code by omitting relevant information in a manner that, in the result, is deceptive."

Joanne Byfield, president of LifeCanada, called the ruling "bizarre" given that the campaign was launched in direct response to recent public celebrations by supporters of Henry Morgentaler, the abortion provider who sparked the legal challenge, on the anniversary of the high-court striking down legal restrictions on abortion.

"There is no legal restriction on abortion in Canada. It is not even a debatable point. One can agree or disagree on whether that is a good thing or not but it is a fact. That was the whole point of the anniversary," said Ms. Byfield.

She said she must assume the decision was more about politics and opposing views on abortion than on common sense.

"With this decision, ASC is playing a censorship role, silencing information some people may not want to hear," she said, accusing the agency of trying to "silence the pro-life voice from public discussion."

Linda Nagel, president of the ASC, said the views of council members who made the decision were not a factor in the decision.

"They are measured, thoughtful, reasonable and objective people," Ms. Nagel said.

Two separate ASC panels considered the billboards, because LifeCanada appealed an earlier decision, and both found the advertisement to be deceptive, she said.

The decision, however, has come long after the one-month campaign ended and the billboards removed.

There are no fines associated with ASC decisions although if an advertiser refuses to comply with a decision to remove an ad the agency can go to the carrying media to discontinue its service to the advertiser.

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