



## ***LifeCanada - VieCanada***

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*THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION CONNECTING EDUCATIONAL PRO-LIFE GROUPS ACROSS CANADA*

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**May 26, 2008**

### **Advertising group says ads are “deceptive”**

In a bizarre ruling last week, Advertising Standards Canada (ASC) rejected evidence from Statistics Canada and declared that pro-life billboards which said abortions are allowed in Canada throughout all nine months of pregnancy were “deceptive.”

Joanne Byfield, president of LifeCanada, the group behind the billboards, said the decision was “unbelievable. Our ads simply state the reality in Canada that there is no law restricting abortion at any stage of pregnancy. This ruling says it is ‘deceptive’ to tell Canadians that.”

ASC is a self-regulating body of Canada’s advertising industry. It oversees the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards. The Appeal Panel, a group of unnamed members of ASC, upheld an earlier decision by another unnamed Council, supporting the complaints of three anonymous people. Two of them in identically worded complaints said the ads were “neither factual nor true.” The third said they were “false, misleading and offensive.”

The ads, which ran in over 50 communities, show a pregnant woman with the words: “Nine months. The length of time abortion is allowed in Canada. Abortion: Have we gone too far? [www.AbortionInCanada.ca](http://www.AbortionInCanada.ca).” The website includes details on the history, statistics, methods and other relevant information. The educational campaign coincided with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Morgentaler Supreme Court decision and intense media coverage. “We wanted to ensure Canadians heard all the perspectives on the results of that decision,” said Byfield.

The Appeal Panel said the billboards were deceptive because they did not mention access issues, which the Panel seemed to assume involved medical reasons after the first trimester. “We have no idea where that notion came from,” said Byfield. “We showed them that private abortion clinics advertise abortions up to 20 weeks and some up to 24 weeks without referrals. But in a closed hearing, who knows what ‘evidence’ they consider?”

The Panel criticized the inclusion of “bare numbers” (Statistics Canada charts showing abortions performed after 20 weeks) because they did not “elucidate the reasons why the referred-to abortions were requested or granted or performed.” Statistics Canada’s explanatory notes, stating that since the 1988 decision no medical reason is required for an abortion at any stage, was “confusing” to the Panel so they ignored it, said Byfield.

“With this decision, ASC is playing a censorship role, silencing information some people may not want to hear,” said Byfield. “Our ads are true and quite frankly, most of this country’s print and broadcast media, all of whom are members of ASC, were talking about the lack of legal restrictions on abortion during the same period our ads were running. Some of them are now campaigning against restrictions on free speech. We hope they see this decision for what it is: an attempt to silence the pro-life voice from public discussion.”

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