

**Testimony to the Massachusetts Joint Committee on  
Public Health Hearing on House Bill 489  
“An Act Relative to the Public Health Impact  
of Commercialism in Schools”  
May 30, 2007**

Good Morning. My name is Lin Vickery. I am here to represent a group of parents from Lunenburg, Mass. As individuals we have differing views on politics and religion. What brings us together and what moves us to testify here today is our deep concern about commercialism in our public schools.

**Here Is Our Story**

Every morning our public middle school students begin the day by watching 12 minutes of "news" and advertising brought to them by Channel One.

Since 1990 Channel One has been converting school time (a public trust) into their private profit. They loan schools TV equipment, and students watch ads and supposed news stories in the classroom.

Channel One and their current owner, Alloy Media and Marketing, use the in-school news show and the channelone.com web site as a two-pronged youth marketing strategy. The TV show pushes ads out to students, and the website pulls in children's demographic data.

**Why Are We Concerned?**

The Channel One Network is, first and foremost, a marketing company that sells a "pure teen audience" to advertisers. It takes advantage of our children, who are required by law to attend school. No matter where you go in our middle school, you can hear every word of the Channel One broadcast. Students cannot get away from it. This may be Channel One's most valuable commodity. In-school advertising circumvents parents to get to children.

Channel One is less interested in the education and health of our children than in marketing. Channel One has a history of advertising food products that undermine the health of our children, for example Mountain Dew, Doritos, and Hubba Bubba.

Channel One also has a history of promoting age-inappropriate movies and TV shows, such as *Dude Where's my Car*, and *Laguna Beach* (a soap opera), to young adolescents.

Channel One's advertisers take advantage of children's unique vulnerabilities. For example, LG has promoted its line of "chocolate" phones to students, like candy to babies.

Much of the one full week of school that our students spend watching Channel One annually focuses on celebrities and their products--- Condoleeza Rice and her iPod, the troops in Iraq and their Playstation 2s, guest hosts and their latest movies and music CDs. Channel One doesn't count these as ads.

During PSAs, children are routinely told to visit the Channel One web site for advice in handling serious problems, such as suspected drug abuse.

Channel One (not our educators) decides its ads and content. When a disturbing story is aired, like the one about the Pennsylvania school shootings, it is a marketing company that delivers the details. Other stories cover terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and violence against children, leaving many students emotionally disturbed and cognitively shut down--the optimal state to be fed an ad, but no condition for learning.

Starting the day by watching disturbing TV stories and focusing on coveted material items is counterproductive for children, especially those with attention issues and learning disorders.

## **How Did This Happen in Our Schools?**

Members of our school committee were tempted by the free equipment. The program was allowed into the high school on a trial basis, and then never monitored or re-evaluated as originally promised. Instead, the show was brought into the middle school and aired to a much younger audience.

Since then, Channel One has gone under the radar. The contract is automatically renewed every three years. No one can even find a copy of it. Billed to parents by our school administrators as "news by kids for kids," and shown during homeroom, even the most involved parents were not aware of what was shown.

## **What We Have Been Doing to Eliminate Channel One from Our School**

- We researched Channel One and its parent company.
- We researched the effects of advertising on children.
- We researched the effects of violent media on adolescents.
- We watched the daily broadcasts.
- We met with a leading expert on Channel One.
- We attended a conference on commercialism and youth.
- We developed a web site about Channel One and the effects of TV advertising on children.
- We wrote letters to school administrators.
- We wrote letters to school committee members.
- We wrote letters to the editors of local newspapers.
- We contacted other parents.
- We collected signatures on a petition against advertising in our public schools.
- We participated on a school advertising policy advisory committee.

- And, every morning of this school year, seven of our children have stood up and walked out of the classroom during the broadcast.

All of this to resolve just one instance of advertising in our schools, and still it wasn't enough. Despite our best efforts and the courage of a small group of students, Channel One is still being aired to our middle school students every single day!

It is impossible for parents to fight every instance of targeted, in-school marketing. We need to level the playing field. As parents of public school students, we need policies to protect our children who have become valuable commodities to corporate advertisers. Powerful and savvy corporations circumvent parents to connect with our 11 to 18 year olds "where they are," in our public schools.

Please help us to ensure that our public schools are used as intended-- to educate our children, and not to provide a captive audience for corporate profit.

Thank you for your time.

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