



THE OBESITY SOCIETY

Position Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Obesity Society Calls Billboard Campaign Offensive and Off-Target

Silver Spring, MD, August 2009, The Obesity Society strongly opposes the current billboard campaign from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) promoting vegetarianism at the expense of stigmatizing overweight and obese persons. The PETA billboard ad displays an image of an overweight woman in a bikini, with the text “*Save the Whales – Lose the Blubber: Go Vegetarian.*” This ad is an unmistakable example of stigma and prejudice against individuals who are overweight and obese. The campaign is disrespectful and offensive, and is not an effective or appropriate way to encourage vegetarianism or healthy eating behaviors.

PETA purports to be an organization against cruelty, yet its ad campaign reeks of cruelty toward a segment of the population already vulnerable to stigma and discrimination. Not only is this billboard campaign hypocritical, but it undermines PETA’s credibility. There is no reason for messages encouraging vegetarianism to be communicated in such a stigmatizing, harmful manner. The people that PETA hopes to target in this campaign are only left feeling humiliated, ashamed, and stigmatized, quite the opposite of effective or appropriate motivation for encouraging weight loss or healthy eating behaviors.

Research evidence demonstrates that weight stigma often leads to and may reinforce unhealthy eating behaviors. With two-thirds of Americans overweight or obese, this type of deliberate weight bias is unacceptable. Stigmatization of individuals who are struggling with their weight results in considerable suffering and impaired quality of life. The Obesity Society opposes weight bias and discrimination in all forms, and calls on PETA to remove the billboard and ensure that stigmatizing messages are absent from future campaigns.

The prevalence of weight discrimination in the United States has increased by 66 percent in the past decade, and is now on par with rates of racial discrimination. As the leading scientific organization on obesity, The Obesity Society is committed to increasing public awareness about weight bias and its negative consequences for those affected.

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The Obesity Society (www.obesity.org) is the leading scientific organization dedicated to the study of obesity. The Obesity Society has been committed to encouraging research on the causes and treatment of obesity and is keeping the medical community and public informed of new advances. The Obesity Society’s vision is to be the leader in understanding, preventing and treating obesity and in improving the lives of those affected. The Obesity Society’s membership comprises more than 2000 basic and clinical researchers, who have published extensively, and care providers in obesity treatment and prevention.