



NEW JERSEY ITALIAN
AMERICAN LEGISLATIVE
CAUCUS

December 22, 2009

HON. JOSEPH F. VITALE
CHAIR

Mr. Philippe P. Dauman
President and Chief Executive Officer
Viacom, Inc.
1515 Broadway
New York, NY 10036

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Dear Mr. Dauman:

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HON. JOHN F. MCKEON
HON. FREDERICK SCALERA
HON. LINDA STENDER
HON. VALERIE VAINIER-HUTTLE

As Italian American leaders in the State of New Jersey, we write to you to express our deep concerns with the MTV Networks program, *Jersey Shore*. We find the content to be an offensive, inaccurate portrayal of Italian Americans and contrary to New Jersey's efforts to reduce hate and bias-related crime. We appeal to the strong sense of corporate responsibility that Viacom, Inc. has demonstrated throughout its entertainment programming history and strongly urge you to take the necessary action to immediately remove *Jersey Shore* from your networks.

NEW JERSEY ITALIAN
AND ITALIAN AMERICAN
HERITAGE COMMISSION

In your own words, "*MTV Networks, a unit of Viacom, doesn't just reflect popular culture – we shape it.*"¹ *Jersey Shore* is a fabrication created by MTV Networks and marketed to represent reality. It was filmed on a set, which, in fact is not a reality, but an oceanfront deck that was constructed for and dismantled after filming. A story-line, while perhaps not scripted, was created and a cast of Italian Americans hired. While MTV Networks has, to date maintained that *Jersey Shore* simply continues the networks history of documenting various subcultures, we whole heartedly disagree. This is a far cry from a documentary of a naturally occurring subculture existing in New Jersey. The subculture depicted in *Jersey Shore* is one created solely by MTV Networks.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

RICHARD BILOTTI
CHAIR

The intentional and encouraged use of ethnically derogatory terms to promote a television program with an Italian American cast is unconscionable. Pejorative words including 'guido' and 'guidette' should have been discouraged by network management. In fact, their very use by cast is a breach of Viacom's Global Business Practices Statement requiring a harassment-free workplace environment, standards every Viacom employee is expected to meet.²

N. LARRY PARAGANO
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Instead of taking the appropriate disciplinary action to ensure a harassment-free work place, MTV Networks chose to include multiple clips of cast members using these derogatory words to promote this program. Producers even went so far as to perpetuate the use of these terms by asking cast members to define them during

¹ <http://www.mtvnetworkscareers.com/about-us/> as it appears on December, 16, 2009.

² Global Business Practices Statement, Viacom, Inc., Pages 23-24.

one-on-one interviews. Viacom has a legal and ethical responsibility to uphold policies intended to maintain a harassment-free work place. We point to the closing paragraph of Viacom's Global Business Practices Statement, "*Viacom expects you to observe not only the letter but also the spirit of its policies... you cannot encourage, participate or assist in conduct that breaches these policies.*"³

We remind you that New Jersey has one of the strongest bias crime laws in the Nation. As such, a significant investment is made each year in prejudice reduction education in our school systems, workplaces and communities. Viacom's Global Business Practices Statement addresses the standards for which you expect employees to comply with local laws, "*Viacom's ethical standards are based on obeying the letter and the spirit of the law. Therefore, you must always conduct your business affairs with honesty, integrity and good judgment.*"⁴

The letter and spirit of New Jersey law is clear; it is to encourage, develop, promote and strengthen respect for human rights and cultural diversity as well as to prevent and combat racism, intolerance and bigotry. The bias-related acts displayed by employees of MTV Networks in the production and marketing of *Jersey Shore*, by their nature, are confrontational, inflame tensions and promote social hostility. These acts are contrary to the spirit of New Jersey law and jeopardize the active and open pursuit of freedom and opportunity. They represent nothing less than a direct attack upon the ethnic heritage of our Italian American citizens.

For these reasons, we implore upon your good judgment as well as Viacom's longstanding commitment to maintaining high business practice standards and we strongly urge you to cancel the *Jersey Shore* program immediately.

We invite you to meet with members of the New Jersey Italian American Caucus and the New Jersey Italian and Italian American Heritage Commission to learn about our shared efforts to preserve and promote an accurate, bias free and non-stereotyped understanding and awareness of the contributions and accomplishments that our citizens of Italian heritage have made to our State, our Nation and our world.

Sincerely,

Joseph F. Vitale
Chairman
New Jersey Italian American
Legislative Caucus

Richard Bilotti
Chairman
New Jersey Italian and Italian
American Heritage Commission

³ Global Business Practices Statement, Viacom, Inc., Page 44.

⁴ Global Business Practices Statement, Viacom, Inc., Page 7.

cc: Viacom, Inc. Board of Directors:
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