

The city of La Mesa California has adopted a new policy for combating prostitution within its city limits. The City buys space in the local newspaper to publish the names and mug shots of those found guilty of offering or soliciting sex for money – whether peddling wares or trying to buy. The city put up five billboards warning: When convicted La Mesa offers free photos! In mid January three patrons of prostitutes became the first to make the paper. The trio's names, ages, and photos landed in the Daily Californian (circulation 25,000) right next to the winning California State Lottery number.

(Newsweek, 2/6/95)

Is La Mesa's new policy to combat prostitution within its city limits morally justifiable? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: The policy is not justifiable. Perhaps some patrons of prostitutes deserve public humiliation in light of what their patronage indicates about their moral character. One cannot say, however, that this applies to all patrons in all cases. Such a concern might be overridden in the case of serious offenses where society has an overwhelmingly strong interest in deterrence. Prostitution does not fall into this category.

Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, 1995

© Robert Ladenson, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995