

February 27, 2013

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver
Room 932
Legislative Office Building

Re: Statement Opposing Legalization of Cage Fighting in New York

Dear Assembly Speaker Silver:

We are writing to urge you to uphold the State of New York's ban against professional cage fighting events, and to resist efforts by Las Vegas-based Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) to bring these violent spectacles to New York.

In the wake of the tragic mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, it is unthinkable that lawmakers in any jurisdiction would risk exposing our children to an activity that involves extreme violence and brutality. (**See our attachment** for a detailed list of recent controversies and scandals associated with cage fighting.)

Cage fighting, also known as "ultimate fighting" and "mixed martial arts," is sensationalized violence that has no place in civilized society. In these contests, fighters are allowed to ***knock each other unconscious through elbows, kicks and knees to the head***¹; and to ***strangle each other to the point of passing out through choke holds***.² At least four cage fighters from the United States are reported to have died from injuries sustained during amateur or professional cage fights.³

We are also deeply concerned that cage fighters have competed in public stadiums and on television bearing Neo-Nazi messages in tattoos and on clothing.⁴ The Southern Poverty Law Center wrote:

*"Not surprisingly, this rapidly rising blood sport is likewise wildly popular among racist skinheads and other young extremists with a thirst for violence."*⁵

These public displays of violence and hate are all the more troubling in light of the fact that cage fighting is being actively marketed to children. Today, children as young as seven years old are participating in cage fighting tournaments.⁶ Videos of these contests show children punching and kicking each other from behind chain-link fences, while adult spectators clap and cheer.⁷

In his State of the State Speech, Governor Cuomo asserted that New York "must remain the progressive capital of the nation." Clearly, an entertainment spectacle that allows people to pummel each other in bloodstained cages has no place in a state that aspires to be a model for progressives, as well as a capital of art and culture.

As a society, we have an obligation to protect our children from extreme violence and hate speech, just as we have an obligation to protect our children from drugs, alcohol and pornography. We strongly urge you to vote against any proposal that would bring cage fighting events to the State of New York.

See List of Signatures on following page

This statement has been signed by the following religious and community leaders:

Daniel Cantor

Executive Director
Working Families Party
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Patrick J. Carolan

Executive Director
Franciscan Action Network
Washington, D.C.

Father John P. Duffell

Associate Pastor
Church of the Blessed Sacrament
New York, N.Y.

Rita Freedman

Acting Executive Director
Jewish Labor Committee
New York, N.Y.

Joseph J. Fahey, Ph.D.

Co-Founder and Chair, Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice
Director, Labor Studies Program, Manhattan College
Bronx, N.Y.

Rabbi Michael E. Feinberg

Executive Director
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition
New York, N.Y.

David L. Gregory

Dorothy Day Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law
Executive Director, Center for Labor and Employment Law
New York, N.Y.

Father Brian Jordan, O.F.M.

Chaplain
Saint Francis College
Brooklyn Heights, N.Y.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs

Executive Director
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
New York, N.Y.

Marjorie Dove Kent

Executive Director
Jews for Racial and Economic Justice
New York, N.Y.

Father J. Cletus Kiley

Director of Immigration Policy
UNITE HERE

Sister Marie Lucy, O.S.F.

Director of Advocacy and Member Relations
Franciscan Action Network
Washington, D.C.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik

Executive Vice President
New York Board of Rabbis
New York, N.Y.

Dr. Laurence Thomas

Professor, Department of Philosophy
Syracuse University
Syracuse, N.Y.

¹ UFC.com: <http://www.ufc.com/discover/fighter/skills/striking>

² UFC.com, “Ways To Win,” <http://www.ufc.com/discover/sport/ways-to-win>; “YouTube video, “MMA Fighter Choked Unconscious, Ring Fever Exclusive,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CwDXuw4Mc4>; YouTube video, “Dustin Duffy Choked Unconscious in First Fight,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htTyxtdkerk>; YouTube video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHSY2PQ6ywo>; YouTube video, “Stranglehold – The Sickest MMA Chokes of All Time,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aOw22ftI1Y>

³ Budllong, Jeff, “Sturgis man dies after MMA fight in Rapid City,” May 30, 2012, *Rapid City Journal*, http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/sturgis/sturgis-man-dies-after-mma-fight-in-rapid-city/article_d6bfb780-3c13-5482-84bf-7926f686772d.html; Lengerich, Ryan, “Fighter died from blunt force trauma, autopsy reveals,” July 12, 2012, *Rapid City Journal*, http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/fighter-died-from-blunt-force-trauma-autopsy-reveals/article_1fb84d49-0ca8-51d7-a269-eb771a8b48be.html; Daily, Karen, “Autopsy confirms MMA fighter died from head injury in bout,” June 29, 2010, *Aiken Standard*, <http://www.aikenstandard.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100629/AIK0101/306299982>; Botter, Jeremy, “Cause of death determined in case of Houston fighter Vasquez,” April 7, 2008, *Houston Chronicle*, <http://blog.chron.com/fighting/2008/04/cause-of-death-determined-in-case-of-houston-fighter-vasquez/>; Sievert, Steve, “Mixed martial arts has 1st death with Houstonian,” Dec. 3, 2007, *Houston Chronicle*, <http://www.chron.com/sports/article/Mixed-martial-arts-has-1st-death-with-Houstonian-1800986.php>; Botter, Jeremy, “Cause of death determined in case of Houston fighter Vasquez,” April 7, 2008, *Houston Chronicle*, <http://blog.chron.com/fighting/2008/04/cause-of-death-determined-in-case-of-houston-fighter-vasquez/>; Associated Press, “American Dies in Ukraine During `Ultimate Fighting,’” March 19, 1998, *Buffalo News*, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-23029500.html>; Associated Press News Archive, “Man Dies After Ultimate Fight Match,” March 19, 1998, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1998/Man-Dies-After-Ultimate-Fight-Match/id-abf4c3279aa3852fc64b934a40790862>

⁴ Hendricks, Maggie, “Ohio Athletic Commission investigating Strikeforce’s Brandon Saling,” March 4, 2012, *Yahoo! Sports*, <http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/mma-cagewriter/ohio-athletic-commission-investigating-strikeforce-brandon-saling-182237629.html>; *CBSSports.com*, “Registered sex offender was on Strikeforce card,” March 4, 2012, <http://www.cbssports.com/mcc/blogs/entry/5881996/35083981>; Dure, Beau, “Shirt company dropped after blog furor,” Dec. 9, 2009, *USA Today*, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/mma/post/2009/12/shirt-company-dropped-after-blog-furor/1>; Hendricks, Maggie, “Holzer Reich’s Nazi-esque shirts make way to UFC and Spike TV,” Dec. 7, 2009, *Yahoo! Sports*, <http://sports.yahoo.com/mma/blog/cagewriter/post/Holzer-Reich-s-Nazi-esque-shirts-make-way-to-UFC?urn=mma,207055>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Keown, Tim, “The kid gloves come on,” Dec. 25, 2012, *ESPN The Magazine*, http://espn.go.com/mma/story/_/id/8766646/future-mma-kids-crazy-rayfield-espn-magazine

⁷ Ibid.