



**REPORT OF THE BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE
ON PROTECTION OF CHILDREN
FROM VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA
SB 707 (2001)**

Findings and Recommendations

December 19, 2001

Hon. Frank Keating
Governor
State of Oklahoma

Submitted to:
Sen. Stratton Taylor
President Pro Tempore
State Senate

Rep. Larry E. Adair
Speaker
House of Representatives

<http://www.lsb.state.ok.us/senate/welcome.html>

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**THE BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON
PROTECTION OF CHILDREN
FROM VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA
SB 707 (2001)**

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Report of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Protection of Children from Violence in the Media SB 707 (2001)

Introduction and Background

Senate Bill 707, passed by the 48th Legislature and signed by Governor Keating, established the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Protection of Children from Violence in the Media. Twenty-four (24) members, appointed equally by the Governor, President Pro Tempore and the Speaker, were drawn from the media industry, the retail industry, clergy, government, the entertainment industry, child psychology, parents with minor children or representatives of a parent-teacher association, and law enforcement.

Senate Bill 707 authorizes the Task Force to “examine violence in the media industry and ascertain ways to protect children from violence in the media.” The Act also gives the Task Force the responsibility to “develop recommendations relating to the protection of children from violence in the media and to make recommendations for any resulting legislation.”

Task Force Process

The Task Force met from August through December and heard presentations from the media entertainment industry, the video retail industry, a forensic psychologist, a child psychologist, the local television industry, and a public health representative.

Much debate occurred as to the impact of media on children, both beneficial and harmful. In addition, the absence of specific legislative proposals in this report in no way suggests to the Governor or Legislature that legislative proposals were not investigated or proposed.

Findings

The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Protection of Children from Violence in the Media:

1. Unanimously recognizes that environment and the content of children’s lives is important;
2. Also recognizes that parents are in the best position to determine what constitutes appropriate forms of media for their children. Parents need to be vigilant in monitoring the media to which their children are exposed and need to plan how to best protect them from any content they find objectionable; and.

3. Understands that the rapid expansion of media alternatives in the Twenty-First Century makes it difficult for citizens of Oklahoma to obtain information regarding the content of movies, computer/video games, TV shows, music and other forms of entertainment.

Fortunately, many resources already exist that can assist parents to make informed choices. The challenge for parents is to easily identify those resources that are current and comprehensive in nature.

While specific legislative proposals were not reviewed, Task Force discussions focused on two main areas around which to develop recommendations:

I. Parental responsibility and educating parents on how to monitor their children's media exposure; and

II. Actions the media entertainment industry can take to help parents make wise choices regarding their children's media viewing.

Recommendations

I. Parental and Community Responsibility and Education

A. **Parental Education:** Discussions centered on the need to provide parents more education on media content and the current ratings systems. There was concern that information on the ratings systems was not as available as some Task Force members would like. To help increase awareness of the ratings systems and provide more education to parents, the Task Force recommends:

1. Creating a state **Media Education Website for Oklahoma Parents** (*See Appendix*), to contain:

a. information and suggestions for parents and caregivers on the subject of making thoughtful entertainment choices,

b. resources for parents, including:

- (1) additional information and resources on the various media ratings systems in place today,
- (2) recent improvements to those systems,
- (3) sources of alternative content reviews,
- (4) content "blockers," such as v-chips, available on the market today,
- (5) where to direct complaints and suggestions, etc.,
- (6) suggested guidelines for responsible, age-appropriate viewing and play, and
- (7) ways for parents to discuss media content with their children.

2. Incorporating the Media Education Website into the new **YourOklahoma.com** as a clearinghouse for web information to various media education resources. Since this information is already available on the Internet, the state could easily and economically create a centralized website with links to resources. To generate

interest in the issue and create demand, the website could further be promoted through School websites, open-houses, parent-teacher conferences, state-funded public service announcements in newspapers or on television, and through a government-sponsored media education week with a “kick-off” event to unveil the Media Education Website. The website would be hosted by the State Department of Education, and would provide links to currently existing informational sources, as well as conduct periodic updates to the site to ensure that as many sources available are identified for parents.

The Task Force hopes that private organizations such as PTAs, churches, libraries and others will work in a coordinated effort to disseminate information to parents about the ratings systems as well as the content of the Media Education Website. In addition, the support of these organizations will be extremely helpful in assisting those parents who might not have home computer/Internet access to easily obtain the information.

3. Increasing dissemination of ratings information beyond video retail stores through PTA and other organizations.

B. Parental Responsibility:

1. In addition to the Task Force’s recommendations above, many members, who did not include any entertainment industry representatives, suggested what they thought parents should consider when making decisions about what media content their children should experience in the home (television, movies, music, or computer/video games):

- a. where are televisions/computers located?
- b. how much media entertainment is consumed?
- c. what are the favorite shows/movies/computer/video games/CDs?
- d. is the content violent?
- e. is the violence realistic?
- f. is violence used by the hero/heroine in the story?
- g. is the violence unpunished or even rewarded?
- h. does the violence depict real consequences? (victim’s health, life, family, etc.)
- i. is the interaction with the violent media associated with pleasure? (laughing, snacking, trip to the movies/video store, having friends over etc.)
- j. is obesity a factor for my child that could be aggravated by excessive media interaction?

- k. does my child behave more aggressively after interacting with violent media content?
2. The same members also suggested that parents be encouraged to talk with their children about depictions of violence in the media. They further suggested that parents consider the following questions as a starting point for discussion:
 - a. Is the violence real or pretend?
 - b. What do you think would happen next?
 - c. What would happen if you did that?
 - d. What would be a good way to resolve the situation? and
 - e. How do we handle similar situations at home?

C. School Involvement: Because of schools' unique positions to provide information to children, schools can play a role by:

1. Continuing to make violence education programs and assemblies available to students and parents. The Task Force recommends greater use and implementation of existing programs and inclusion of additional information on media content; and
2. Including a link to the YourOklahoma.com parent website on the State Department of Education and local school websites.

D. Statewide Community Activities: Communities across Oklahoma have the opportunity to rally around parents and support them in their efforts to make wise choices regarding their children's media exposures. Specific efforts communities might make include:

1. Public Service Announcements (PSAs) should be made or already existing PSA's should be aired in community markets across Oklahoma to disseminate information on media content including, but not limited to, violence.
2. Sponsor a Media Violence Education Week to highlight various non-media alternatives such as state/community activities, Boy/Girl Scouts, youth athletics, youth civic/charitable/faith activities, family game night, and other community attractions. In addition, the Legislature should provide for a Violence Education Week in partnership with the State Department of Education, the State Tourism and Recreation Department and communities.

II. Industry Commitment and Responsibility

Finally, many task force members made additional suggestions to entertainment industry members for consideration by their trade associations and member companies. Those recommendations included:

A. Public Service Announcements (PSAs): The industry should promote and increase dissemination of PSAs on media content.

B. Increased Efforts Related to Distribution of Ratings Information: The retail industry should continue its efforts to ensure that employees are properly educated on the ratings systems and that they do not allow access to content that is not age appropriate.

C. Family Hour: The Task Force recommends that network and local broadcasters explore the possibility of more family friendly programming, particularly during the 7pm to 8pm hour. Currently, the family hour can include shows with objectionable content.

D. More Options for Family Friendly Products: The industry should investigate the feasibility of offering more family-friendly options to consumers including new technologies to control content.

E. Advertising Content: The industry should be sensitive to parental concerns over inappropriate advertising content. Specifically, the industry should monitor sports programming for inappropriate material. Several Task Force members commented on the objectionable content of advertisements shown during the World Series and football games they were watching with their young children.

F. Family Friendly News Broadcasts: The news media contributes to media violence by covering violent stories. The news industry should designate at least one news broadcast per day that is family-friendly and that will not expose children to violent themes.

Appendix

MEDIA EDUCATION WEBSITE FOR OKLAHOMA PARENTS

American Academy of Pediatrics: Media Matters www.aap.org/advocacy/mediamatters.htm

Media Matters is a national public education campaign of the American Academy of Pediatrics. It was launched in 1997 to help pediatricians, parents, and children become more aware of the influence that media (television, movies, computer and video games, Internet, advertising, popular music, etc.) have on child and adolescent health. Issues of concern include the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs; aggression and violence; sex and sexual exploitation; obesity and poor nutrition. Media Matters advocates for media education, or learning how to analyze the media through critical thinking and viewing, as a way to mitigate these problems.

Parents Television Council <http://www.parentstv.org/>

Established in 1995 as a nonpartisan group, offering private sector solutions to restore television to its roots as an independent and socially responsible entertainment medium.

Center for Media Literacy www.medialit.org/ReadingRoom/readingroom.htm

The Center for Media Literacy is dedicated to a new vision of literacy for the 21st century: the ability to communicate competently in all media forms, print and electronic, as well as to access, understand, analyze and evaluate the powerful images, words and sounds that make up our contemporary mass media culture. The mission is to bring media literacy education to every child, every school and every home in North America.

Iowa State University Extension: Youth and Family Violence Prevention Initiative

www.extension.iastate.edu/Pages/yfvp/homepage.html

www.extension.iastate.edu/families/media/index.html

The Youth & Family Violence Prevention Initiative is a priority for Iowa State University Extension. This Initiative is a collaboration between Iowa State University educators in youth, family, community development, and agriculture and representatives from communities across the state who are committed to changing those views or practices that accept violence as legitimate.

National Institute on Media and the Family www.mediafamily.org

The National Institute on Media and the Family, founded by David Walsh, Ph.D., is a national resource for teachers, parents, community leaders and other caring adults who are interested in the influence of electronic media on early childhood education, child development, academic performance, culture and violence. The Institute offers a number of unique resources including: movie, television and video game content ratings; media awareness programs; and helpful hints for parents and families to evaluate their media use.

Children Now www.childrennow.org

Working to improve the quality of news and entertainment media both for children and about children's issues.

The Lion & Lamb Project www.lionlamb.org

The mission of The Lion & Lamb Project is to stop the marketing of violence to children. We do this by helping parents, industry and government officials recognize that violence is not child's play – and by galvanizing concerned adults to take action. Lion & Lamb works to reduce the marketing of violent toys, games and entertainment to children in two distinct ways. We work with parents and other concerned adults to reduce the demand for violent “entertainment” products, and with industry and government to reduce the supply of such products.

Killology Research Group www.killology.com

Killology Research Group examines how culture and society change when one human being kills another. The lives of individuals and families in our society can be literally transformed and the world can become a safer place through education about the causes and impacts of violent behavior.

The Illinois Center for Violence Prevention

www.icvp.org/violenceAndTV.asp

The Illinois Center for Violence Prevention, founded in 1992 as a private not-for-profit organization, is dedicated to the prevention of interpersonal violence, including family violence (child, partner, and elder abuse); sexual assault; youth violence; gang and gun violence; and hate crimes.

STOP Commercial Exploitation of Children

www.commercialexploitation.com

We are health care professionals, parents, educators, businesses and advocates who are alarmed about the recent escalation of corporate marketing directed at children and marketers continuing to promote violence to children. It is time for people who care about children to take a stand against their exploitation as a consumer group.

Brutality Isn't Child's Play

www.bicp.org

We are a group of individuals and organizations who are concerned about the degenerative effects of media violence on our children. We are concerned about the promotion of violence, sexual brutality, and obscenity as appropriate entertainment for children.

Join Together: Take Action

www.jointogether.org

Articles cover substance abuse and gun violence.

Media Awareness Network

www.media-awareness.ca

Contains resources to help parents deal with the media influences in their children's lives.

Media Scope

www.mediascope.org

Mediascope is a national, nonprofit research and policy organization working to promote issues of social relevance within the entertainment industry. Founded in 1992, a principal objective is to encourage responsible portrayals in film, television, the Internet, video games, music and advertising.

Talking With Kids

1-800-CHILD-44

www.talkingwithkids.org

Talking With Kids About Tough Issues is a national initiative to encourage parents to talk with their children earlier and more often about tough issues like sex, HIV/AIDS, violence, alcohol, and drug abuse.

PBS Kids:TV Tips for Parents

<http://pbskids.org/grownups/rtltvtips.html>

Are you aware of what your kids are learning from television? Find out how to help them build a healthy TV diet! This web-area contains basic tools for helping you fine-tune your kids' programming choices, plus valuable tips for helping them get the most out of their viewing experiences.

National Issues Forum: Violent Kids, Can We Change The Trend?

www.nifi.org/violent.html

NIF is a nationwide network of educational and community organizations that deliberate about nation-wide issues. This site offers you an opportunity to learn about NIF concepts, such as media violence. You can find out how to begin holding forums in your community, schools, churches or civic organizations. You can also exchange ideas on their message board. NIF is non-partisan and does not advocate a specific solution or point of view. Rather, deliberative forums provide a way for citizens to exchange ideas and experiences with one another, and make more thoughtful and informed decisions.

Turn Off the Violence

www.turnofftheviolence.org

Violence is a learned behavior and it can be unlearned. The mission of Turn Off the Violence is to educate and inspire people to prevent violence in their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

UCLA Center for Communication Policy

<http://www.ccp.ucla.edu/pages/VReports.asp#a>

The UCLA Center for Communication Policy was asked to monitor all television with a particular emphasis on broadcast network television. The UCLA study examines every series, television movie, theatrical film shown on television, children's program, special and advertisement aired during a television season. Over 3,000 hours of television are monitored every year. In a major difference from many previous studies, the UCLA report examines the context in which violence occurs thus distinguishing between violence which in its context raises concerns and that which does not.

TIPS FOR PARENTS/MEDIA LITERACY

LINKS TO WEB-BASED RESOURCES ON MEDIA LITERACY AND TIPS FOR PARENTS:

<http://www.ciconline.org/section.cfm/7/66/70>
<http://www.pbs.org/americaresponds/parents.html>
<http://pbskids.org/grownups/rtltvtips.html>
<http://www.ciconline.org/section.cfm/4/108>
<http://www.assignmentmedialit.com/>
<http://www.ciconline.org/section.cfm/7/67>

MEDIA RATINGS SYSTEMS

LINKS TO:

<http://www.parentalguide.org/>
<http://www.imdb.com>
<http://www.filmratings.com>
<http://www.mpaa.org/movieratings/>
<http://www.hollywood.com/>
<http://www.imdb.com/>
<http://www.moviefone.com>
<http://www.movies.go.com/>
<http://www.movieweb.com/>
<http://www.allmovie.com>
<http://www.reel.com/>
<http://www.filmvalues.com/index.cfm>
<http://www.screenit.com>
<http://www.kids-in-mind.com>
<http://www.family.org/pplace/pi/films>
<http://www.movie-source.com/parentwatch.html>
<http://www.gospelcom.net/preview/index.html>
<http://www.christiananswers.net/spotlight/movies/home.html>
<http://www.movieguide.org>
<http://www.movies.crosswalk.com>
<http://www.familystyle.com/about.asp>
<http://www.esrb.org>
<http://www.kidsnet.com>
<http://www.childrenssoftware.com/default.html>
<http://www.childrenssoftware.com/links.html>
<http://www.netnanny.com/home/home.asp>
<http://www.parents-choice.org/>
<http://www.superkids.com/>

RECENT INDUSTRY INITIATIVES

Initiatives of MPAA Member Companies:

1. Each company requested that theater owners not show trailers advertising films rated R for violence in connection with the exhibition of its G-rated films. In addition, each company does not attach trailers for films rated R for violence on G-rated movies on videocassettes or DVDs containing G-rated movies.
2. No company knowingly includes persons under the age of 17 in research screenings for films rated R for violence, or in research screenings for films which the company reasonably believes will be rated R for violence, unless such person is accompanied by a parent or an adult guardian.
3. Each company has reviewed its marketing and advertising practices in order to further the goal of not inappropriately specifically targeting children in its advertising of films rated R for violence.
4. Each member company has appointed a senior executive compliance officer or committee to review on a regular basis the company's marketing practices in order to facilitate adherence to the initiatives listed above.
5. The MPAA reviews, on an annual basis, how each member company is complying with the initiatives listed above.
6. The MPAA has strongly encouraged theater owners and video retailers to improve compliance with the rating system.
7. The companies have included the reasons for the ratings of films in its print advertising and official movie web sites for such films.
8. The MPAA has established or participated in the establishment of the following web sites: "mpaa.org", "filmratings.com" and "parentalguide.org". "**Mpaa.org**", among other things, describes the rating system and includes a database listing almost every movie rated since the commencement of the rating system in 1968. "**Filmratings.com**" is a separate site devoted exclusively to providing ratings information on all rated movies, including the reasons for the ratings on recent releases. "**Parentalguide.org**" was established by MPAA in conjunction with the electronic game, music, cable and television broadcast industries. The site is intended to provide parents with one central site where they can obtain information about each of the ratings systems that have been developed in those industries. To ensure that this information reaches a wider audience, each company has linked its official movie web site to mpaa.org, filmratings.com and parentalguide.org.
9. Each company now includes on all packages of new rated releases for its videocassettes and DVDs the rating of such film and the reasons for the rating.
10. Each company now includes in the preface to its new rated releases for videocassettes and DVDs the reasons for the rating of the film, plus information about the filmratings.com web site.

11. The MPAA and each company have strongly encouraged theater owners to provide reasons for the ratings of films being exhibited in their theaters in their customer call centers.

12. Each company has furnished newspapers with the reasons for the ratings of each of their films in exhibition and requested that newspapers include those reasons in their movie reviews. The MPAA and each company have sought newspapers' cooperation in printing a daily column listing films in exhibition, their ratings and the reasons for the rating.

ESRB efforts:

<http://www.idsa.com/govt.html>

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS

- V-Chip – *LINK TO: <http://www.vchipeducation.org/>*
LINK TO: <http://www.fcc.gov/vchip/>
LINK TO: <http://store.dove.org/Hardware/Vchip/Default.htm>
- “Cursefree TV”/weeremote/NETNanny, etc. –
LINK TO: www.familycow.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

American Academy of Pediatrics

141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
Web site: <http://www.aap.org>

American Association of School Administrators

Gary Marx, Assoc. Executive Director for Communications
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: 703/528-0700 Fax: 703/528-2146
Web site: <http://www.aasa.org>

American Medical Association

1101 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20005
Web site: <http://www.ama-assn.org>

American Psychological Association

750 First Street NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242
Web site: <http://www.apa.org>

Center for Media Education

1511 K Street NW, Suite 518
Washington, DC 20005
Web site: <http://www.cme.org/>

Center for Media Literacy

4727 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 403
Los Angeles, CA 90010
Phone: 213/931-4177
Web site: <http://www.medialit.org>

Children's Defense Fund

25 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
Web site: <http://www.childrensdefense.org>

Children Now

1212 Broadway, Suite 530
Oakland, CA 94612
Phone: 1-800-CHILD44 Fax: 510/763-1974
Web site: <http://www.childrennow.org>

Federal Communications Commission

<http://www.fcc.gov>

Future WAVE (Working for Alternatives to Violence Through Entertainment)

105 Camino Teresa
Santa Fe, NM 87505
Phone: 505/982-8882 Fax: 505/982-6460

Institute for Mental Health Initiatives

Suzanne Stutman, President
4545 42nd Street, NW Ste. 311
Washington, DC 20016
Phone: 202/364-7111 Fax: 202/363-3891

Just Think Foundation

Elana Yonah Rosen, Executive Director
221 Caledonia Street
Sausalito, CA 94965
Phone: 415/289-0122 Fax: 415/289-0123
Web site: <http://www.justthink.org>

KIDSNET

6856 Eastern Avenue NW, Suite 208
Washington, DC 20012
Web site: <http://www.kidsnet.org>

National Association of Elementary School Principals

1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Web site: <http://www.naesp.org>

The National Alliance for Non-Violent Programming

Whitney Vanderwerff, Ph.D., Executive Director
1846 Banking Street
Greensboro, NC 27408
Phone: 910/370-0407 Fax: 910/370-0392

National Education Association

1201 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
Web site: <http://www.nea.org>

National PTA

330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
Web site: <http://www.pta.org>

Parents Television Council

Mark Honig, Executive Director
333 South Grand Avenue, Suite 2900
Los Angeles, CA 90071
Phone: 213/621-2506 Fax: 213-621-2450
Web site: <http://www.townhall.com/mrc/ptc>

United States Catholic Conference

1011 First Avenue, Suite 1300
New York, NY 10022

<http://www.treas.gov/usss/>

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence/>

WHERE TO DIRECT COMMENTS, COMPLAINTS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Classification and Rating Administration
14144 Ventura Boulevard, Suite 210
Sherman Oaks, CA 91423

Entertainment Software Rating Board
845 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022
800/771-3772 phone

TV Parental Guidelines
Monitoring Board
P.O. Box 14097
Washington, DC 20004
202/879-9364

Local Broadcasters