



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

William Larkin

Senate Passes Legislation To Crack Down On Video Game Violence

WILLIAM J. LARKIN JR. May 21, 2007

Reacting strongly to the recent release of a sick video game which exploits the Virginia Tech University tragedy, Senator Bill Larkin (R-C, Cornwall-on-Hudson) and his colleagues in the Senate Majority today announced that the State Senate has passed legislation that would reduce children's exposure to violent video games.

The bill (S.5888) would establish the Advisory Council on Interactive Media and Youth Violence to review the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) rating system and its effectiveness, and recommend additional steps that can be taken to curb children's access and exposure to such "adult-only" material. The advisory council would consist of nine members and six ex-officio members.

The bill would also require New York State's retailers to place ratings labels on all video games, and establish a Parent-Teacher Anti-Violence Awareness Program to work with students and children on issues related to violence in video games and seek to increase awareness of the ratings system on games.

"There is more and more evidence linking violence in society with increased exposure to violent video games, movies and television," said Senator Larkin. "Do we really want our young people to be this desensitized to violence; to think others' suffering is a 'game;' to lose some of their compassion? These types of games certainly don't promote healthy behavior.

Many in the video game industry have no conscience about what they expose children to. Therefore, we as parents, grandparents, guardians and policy makers who are concerned about the emotional and psychological well-being of young people must take the necessary steps to protect them from what we know is harmful--no matter what the 'entertainment' industry tries to push on our youth."

Currently, video games are rated "E" for everyone, "T" for teens, "M" for mature, and "AO" for adults only. A study by a group of Harvard University researchers published in 2004 reviewed a random sample of 81 "T" rated video games and found that 48 percent contained violence, sexual themes, illegal substance abuse, gambling, or profanity that was not noted on the game box as it should have been. In addition, a recent study published in Applied Developmental Psychology found that only twenty-five percent of parents surveyed said that they "always" check the industry rating of computer and/or video games before renting or buying them.

This legislation would establish the following:

Advisory Council on Interactive Media and Youth Violence -- would establish a new Advisory Council on Media, Entertainment Software and Youth Violence, which will review and make recommendations on the effectiveness of the current Entertainment Software Ratings Boards (ESRB) ratings system in keeping violent video games out of the hands of youth. The panel, which will include parents, educators, experts in child psychology, child welfare advocates, concerned citizens and industry representatives, will also develop policies relating to public education and advocacy against youth violence, examine efforts being undertaken in other states, and develop recommendations for additional ways of regulating the exposure of youth to these games.

Rating System Labeling Requirement -- under current State law, there is no requirement that retailers place labels on video games sold in New York. To address this shortcoming, would establish a new requirement that every video game sold in New York by a retailer or over the Internet, whether new or for resale, must have a clearly displayed rating indication on the game cover or elsewhere (such as on a website). Individuals who violate these provisions will face fines and penalties.

Parent-Teacher Anti-Violence Awareness Program -- would also establish a new Parent-Teacher Anti-Violence Awareness Program, which will empower parents and teachers to work with students and children on issues related to violence in video games. The program will also seek to increase awareness of the ratings system on games, and the importance of appropriate parental supervision. The Anti-Violence Program would be funded through fines on retailers who violate the new labeling law.

The bill was sent to the Assembly.