

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HB 1315

Title: An act relating to video and video games.

Brief Description: Regulating violent video games.

Sponsors: Representatives Dickerson, Ballasiotes, O'Brien, Cairnes, Lovick, Edwards, Rockefeller, Schual-Berke, Kenney, Lantz, Ogden and Gombosky.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONS

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

Video games have become a popular form of entertainment for the young and old alike. Today an estimated 69 percent of American families own or rent video and computer games.

In 1993, Senator Joe Lieberman (from Connecticut) and Senator Herb Kohl (from Wisconsin) held a number of Congressional hearings on violent video games. As a result, they successfully pressured the video-game industry to adopt a rating system to inform parents of games featuring violent and sexually oriented content. By 1994, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) started dividing video games into five categories: EC for players in early childhood, E for everyone, T for teens 13 and older, M for mature players 17 and older, and AO for adults only. The rating appears on the front of every game box, while on the back there are three or four words that describe the content.

Since 1993, several states have been considering legislation to regulate the sale of violent video games, including such states as California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Tennessee. However, by the end of 1998, no state has enacted legislation regulating video games.

Summary:

The Department of Health is required to study and prepare a report on the most effective ways parents can control juvenile access to violent video games. The report is due to the Legislature by December 31, 1999 and must include the types of violence existing in

video games available on the market, as well as over the Internet; recommendations for educating parents about the level of violence existing in video games; a list of nonviolent video game alternatives for juveniles; and recommendations on the most effective techniques for parents to allow juveniles access to only age-appropriate video games. The report must also include any current research that links violent television shows, movies, and video games to acts of violence by juveniles.

The Department of Health must also complete a second study. The second study will be a definitive scientific study,– and must be implemented through a request for proposal process. As part of this definitive study, the department must ensure that the research addresses: (1) whether, and to what extent, violent video games encourage or increase aggressive acts by juveniles exposed to those games, with specificity regarding specific games and types of games, and with specificity regarding juvenile age groups; and (2) effective methods for parental control of juvenile access to violent video games and for abatement of aggressive juvenile behaviors related to violent video games.

In addition, the Department of Revenue must study the methods for collecting a user fee on the rental and sale of unrated video games, video games rated NC-17 and M, and video games that are even more restrictively rated. All user fees collected will be divided evenly between the Crime Victims' Compensation Program and the Department of Health for parent educational programming. The department will also research alternative methods for collecting the user fees and will identify and estimate the costs of collecting the user fees by small, medium, and large retailers for each alternative. The department must identify and estimate their cost of collecting the fee for each alternative. The Department of Revenue must submit its entire report to the legislative fiscal committees by December 31, 1999.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 1999.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.