

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1366

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Human Services & Corrections, March 31, 2005

**Title:** An act relating to video games.

**Brief Description:** Requiring video game retailers to inform consumers about video game rating systems.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Juvenile Justice & Family Law (originally sponsored by Representatives Roberts, McDonald, B. Sullivan, Dickerson, Morrell, Skinner, Appleton, Hinkle, Moeller, Hasegawa, McCune, Sells, Walsh, Ormsby, Kenney, Kagi and McDermott).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/08/05, 95-3.

**Committee Activity:** Human Services & Corrections: 3/22/05, 3/31/05 [DPA].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, McAuliffe and Thibaudeau.

**Staff:** Kiki Keizer (786-7430)

**Background:** Some video games are rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), a non-profit organization supported by the entertainment industry. The rating system consists of rating symbols that indicate the age group a particular game best suits, as well as content descriptions that indicate the elements of the game that have led to the rating or that might otherwise be of interest or concern.

**Summary of Amended Bill:** Video game retailers are required to conspicuously post signs, informing consumers that a nationally recognized video game rating system exists.

The retailer must provide information explaining the rating system to persons who request the information.

**Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:** Video game retailers must post signs about the video game rating system where video games are displayed. They must also post signs at the point of sale, unless they have a system that prompts the salesperson to check identification on persons under a certain age if they are attempting to purchase games intended for mature audiences.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Testimony For:** Some video games are very violent. Parents should be aware of the rating system so that they can keep very violent games out of their homes. Signs should be where the games are displayed and at the point of sale, so that parents are sure to see them.

**Testimony Against:** Retailers support educating parents about the video game rating system but need flexibility in terms of where to locate signs on the rating system. Placing signs where the video game are displayed is acceptable. The checkstands are already crowded with information, such as notices about checking identification on tobacco and alcohol purchases. Too many signs at the checkstand creates confusion. Trying to inform consumers at the point of sale is really too late in the selection process to be of value. There are other ways to get information to consumers on how the rating system works. For example, many retailers use in-store monitors to educate consumers.

**Who Testified:** PRO: Rep. Mary Helen Roberts, prime sponsor.

CON: Mark Johnson, Washington Retail Association; Sean Bersell, Video Software Dealers Association; Jean Leonard, Entertainment Software Association.