

# THE MEDIA COALITION INC

275 SEVENTH AVENUE • 15<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10001  
PHONE: 212-587-4025 • FAX: 212-587-2436 • WWW.MEDIACOALITION.ORG

DAVID HOROWITZ  
Executive Director

## Memorandum in Opposition to House Bill 1381

The members of Media Coalition believe that House Bill 1381 likely violates the First Amendment rights of retailers and producers of content and others. The members of Media Coalition represent most of the publishers, booksellers, librarians, periodical distributors, recording, movie and video game manufacturers, and recording and video retailers in Louisiana and the rest of the United States.

H.B. 1381 would bar the sale, rental, or lease to a minor of any video game with violent content if it meets a three-part test for what is inappropriate for a minor. A violation would be subject to up to a year in prison and a fine of up to \$1,000

This bill is clearly constitutionally suspect. Speech is presumed to be protected by the First Amendment unless it falls into a few very narrow classes. As the Supreme Court said in *Free Speech Coalition v. Ashcroft*, “As a general principle, the First Amendment bars the government from dictating what we see or read or speak or hear. The freedom of speech has its limits; it does not embrace certain categories of speech, including defamation, incitement, obscenity and pornography produced with children.” 535 U.S.1382, 1389 (2002). None of the types of speech cited by the Supreme Court include speech with violent content alone. Violent content in otherwise constitutionally protected material is not a permissible subject of government regulation for adults or minors. Every court that has addressed this issue has held that speech with violent content, without exception, is constitutionally protected. A series of recent court decisions has reaffirmed this legal doctrine. Laws barring sale or rental of video games with violent content to minors were enacted in 2005 in California, Illinois, and Michigan. The laws were all successfully challenged with U.S. District Court judges granting injunctions barring the enforcement of these restrictions. See *VSDA v. Schwarzenegger*, 401 F. Supp. 2d 1034 (N.D. Cal. 2005) (granting preliminary injunction); *ESA v. Blagojevich*, 404 F. Supp 2d 1051 (N.D. Ill. 2005) (granting a permanent injunction); *ESA v. Granholm*, 404 F. Supp. 2d 978 (E.D. Mich. 2005) (granting preliminary injunction and later granting plaintiffs’ motion for summary judgment). Every prior court that has addressed this issue has held that speech with violent content, without exception, is constitutionally protected. *American Amusement Machine Ass’n v. Kendrick*, 244 F.3d 572 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2001), cert. denied, 122 S.Ct. 462 (2001) enjoined enforcement of a city ordinance that limited minors’ access to violent arcade video games. *Interactive Digital Software Association v. St. Louis County*, 329 F.3d 954 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2003) enjoined enforcement

The Media Coalition is a trade association that defends the First Amendment rights of publishers, booksellers, librarians, recording, motion picture and video games producers, and recording, video, and video game retailers in the United States.

American Booksellers  
Foundation for Free  
Expression

Association of American  
Publishers, Inc.

Comic Book Legal  
Defense Fund

Entertainment Merchants  
Association

Entertainment Software  
Association

Freedom to Read  
Foundation

Magazine Publishers of  
America, Inc.

Motion Picture  
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Inc.

National Association of  
Recording Merchandisers

Publishers Marketing  
Association

Recording Industry  
Association of America,  
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Chris Finan  
American Booksellers  
Foundation for  
Free Expression

General Counsel

Michael A. Bamberger  
Sonnenschein Nath &  
Rosenthal LLP

violent content. *Video Software Dealers Association v. Maleng*, 325 F. Supp. 2d 118 (W.D. Wash. 2004) barred enforcement of a state law that barred dissemination to minors of video games that included violence against "peace officers." *Bookfriends v. Taft*, F. Supp.2d 932 (S.D. Ohio, W. Div. 2002) deemed speech with violent content as fully protected by the First Amendment and enjoined enforcement of Ohio's "harmful to juveniles" law that would have criminalized dissemination to a minor of speech with violent content. *Davis-Kidd Booksellers, Inc. v. McWherter*, 886 S.W. 2d 705 (Tenn. 1993) struck down a restriction on the sale to minors of material containing "excess violence." *Video Software Dealers Assn. v. Webster*, 968 F.2d 684 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1992) held that "unlike obscenity, violent expression is protected by the First Amendment." *State v. Johnson*, 343 So. 2d 705, 710 (La. 1977) declared that prohibiting the sale of violent materials to minors exceeded the limits placed on regulation of obscene materials by the U.S. Supreme Court. *Sovereign News Co. v. Falke*, 448 F. Supp. 306, 400 (N.D. Ohio 1977), while remanded on other grounds, overturned a statute defining as "harmful to minors" material describing or representing "extreme or bizarre violence."

Passage of the bill could prove costly. If a court declares it unconstitutional, there is a good possibility that the state will be ordered to pay the plaintiffs' attorneys' fees. In several recent successful challenges to video game legislation, the state agreed to pay to the plaintiffs more than \$300,000 in attorneys' fees in each litigation.

Again, we ask you to please protect the First Amendment rights of all people of Louisiana and defeat this legislation.