

**REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK POLICE SERVICES BOARD
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - February 23, 2005
RESOLUTION ON VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE**

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board endorse the following resolution on video violence and forward to the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards and the Canadian Association of Police Boards for consideration at their Annual General Meetings in May 2005 and August 2005, respectively.

BACKGROUND

At its November 24, 2004 meeting, the Board viewed the recently-released Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas video game as part of a presentation on video games and violence by York Regional Police.

The Board resolved to communicate with the appropriate agencies and levels of government to urge them to take the necessary steps to stop the proliferation of video games that promote such graphic violence against police officers.

On December 9, 2004, Chair David Barrow wrote to Premier Dalton McGuinty urging the provincial government to take whatever steps are necessary to stop the proliferation of all video games that reward players who, during the course of playing the game, injure or kill police officers. Copies of this correspondence were forwarded to the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards (OAPSB) and the Canadian Association of Police Boards (CAPB).

At its January 26, 2005 meeting, the Board considered Premier Dalton McGuinty's reply. Premier McGuinty advised the Board of the recent reforms by his government to ensure that video games contain information on age-appropriate viewing. Furthermore, Premier McGuinty noted that his government would "continue to work closely with industry representatives to promote awareness of video game classifications and to ensure retailers comply with age-appropriate viewing standards."

In order to obtain more information about the government's planned reforms, the Executive Director consulted with Janet Robinson, Chair of the Ontario Film Review Board, and Randy Hopkins, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Consumer and Business Services.

CLASSIFICATION OF VIDEO GAMES

On its web site, the Ontario Film Review Board notes that the video games industry has a voluntary classification system in place. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), based in New York, issues these classifications. Most video games released since 1994 contain an ESRB classification. The ESRB rating consists of two components - the classification which

indicates age-suitability; and content descriptors that give more detail about the product in terms of violence, sexual themes, language, and other areas.

The ESRB has given Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas a mature rating (i.e. content suitable for individuals 17 years of age and above) and identifies its content descriptors as including "blood and gore, intense violence, strong language, strong sexual content, and use of drugs."

Currently, video games are not regulated in Ontario.

PLANNED LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

On December 9, 2004, the government introduced Bill 158, the Film Classification Act, 2004, to respond to an April 30, 2004 ruling of the Ontario Superior Court decision that found the government's authority to censor film was too broad and unconstitutional. The Film Classification Act, 2004 will come into effect mid-March 2005.

One of the objectives of the new legislation is to respond to emerging media technologies and marketplace changes, such as video games. Regulations will address film classifications, approval criteria and exemptions. The Ontario Film Review Board will also be given the authority to adopt the video game classifications issued by the New-York based Entertainment Software Rating Board.

The new legislation will also create monetary penalties for video game retailers that sell age-inappropriate material to children.

SUMMARY

One of the pending legislative reforms by the Ontario Government will provide authority to the Ontario Film Review Board to adopt the classifications of video games issued by the New-York based Entertainment Software Rating Board.

The planned reforms do not contemplate the continued purchase or sale of video games like Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas that involve the injuring or killing of police officers.

Therefore, the Executive Director has prepared a resolution for consideration at the Annual General Meetings of the OAPSB and the CAPB that speaks specifically to the Board's concerns and interest in stopping the proliferation of these violent video games.

**REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK POLICE SERVICES BOARD
RESOLUTION # 01/05**

WHEREAS the OAPSB and the CAPB are dedicated to the safety of police officers in carrying out their duties and responsibilities on behalf of all citizens;

WHEREAS the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards (OAPSB) and the Canadian Association of Police Boards (CAPB) are also dedicated to the well-being of children and youth;

WHEREAS the video game Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas released in October 2004, allows its players to run over a police officer and steal his gun; kill three innocent bystanders; shoot two more police officers; beat a woman to death; and carjack a taxi driver to a soundtrack of racial slurs and hardcore gangster rap, all the while receiving cumulative rewards for each subsequent killing;

WHEREAS many children spend 90 minutes a day playing video games and many parents are not aware that home video games like Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas involve a constant hurting and/or killing of others, depict violent death and provide cumulative rewards to the player for each killing;

WHEREAS, many in the police governance and law enforcement communities are concerned about the possible influence and effects of visual violence, including the rampant killing of police officers, depicted in video games like Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas;

WHEREAS, the availability of a video game that rewards young people for killing police greatly undermines the positive work that police officers do with youth in our schools and communities;

WHEREAS there is no current legislation in Ontario that requires classification stickers on mainstream videos intended for home use;

WHEREAS the Ontario Film Review Board states it represents a cross-section of many diverse communities across Ontario and therefore reflects their current standards;

WHEREAS under pending legislation by the Ontario Government, the Ontario Film Review Board will be given authority to adopt the American classification system of video games played by Ontario youth;

WHEREAS the Ontario Film Review Board states that its policies have been shaped and influenced by external social forces and that it continues to adapt and mirror the tastes and standards of the various societies it serves;

WHEREAS most informed parents and grandparents would not likely accept that the killing of police officers and women in video games mirrors their tastes or standards or those of the communities in which they live;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the OAPSB and the CAPB urge provincial and federal governments to ban the purchase, sale and distribution of all video games, including Grand Theft Auto - San Andreas, that depict the injuring and killing of police officers, women and children;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the OAPSB and the CAPB urge provincial and federal governments to pass legislation that requires classification stickers on mainstream videos intended for home use;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the OAPSB encourage the Ontario Government to adopt a provincial video game classification system that reflects the standards of Ontario communities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the OAPSB and the CAPB work with the OACP and the CACP in encouraging police services and their community partners to develop effective public awareness strategies aimed at reducing young people's consumption of violent video games.