



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
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DA 26-392

Released: April 22, 2026

FCC'S MEDIA BUREAU SEEKS COMMENT ON FURTHER EMPOWERING PARENTS TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN AND MAKE INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT THE TV PROGRAMS THEIR CHILDREN WATCH

MB Docket No. 19-41

Comments Due: May 22, 2026

Reply Comments Due: June 22, 2026

Over the years, Congress and the FCC have acted to empower parents to determine the type of television programming that is appropriate for their children. Indeed, in 1996, Congress found that television programming has a “uniquely pervasive presence in the lives of American children” and “influences children’s perceptions of the values and behavior that are common and acceptable in society.”¹ Congress then determined that parents should be provided with timely information about the nature of upcoming video programming and have the ability to block violent, sexual, or other programming that parents believe is harmful to their children.²

In passing this legislation, Congress provided the relevant television and video programming industries with an option. They could establish their own voluntary system for rating video programming or the Commission could establish a ratings system itself. Industry representatives chose to set up their own voluntary system, and the Commission in 1998 found that industry’s approach met the relevant statutory criteria.³ As a result, industry established the TV Oversight Management Board (TVOMB),⁴

¹ See Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, § 551, 110 Stat. 56, 139 (1996) (Telecommunications Act).

² Congress specifically excluded ratings based on political or religious content. *Id.* at § 551.

³ See *Implementation of Section 551 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Video Programming Ratings*, Docket No 97-55, Report and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 8232 (1998); Telecommunications Act, § 551(e)(1) (giving the Commission authority to establish a ratings system if program distributors failed, after one year from the enactment date, to develop a voluntary rating system acceptable to the Commission). Concomitantly, the Commission adopted an order implementing requirements for V-chip technology, which allows parents to block material based on its rating. See *Technical Requirements to Enable Blocking of Video Programming Based on Program Ratings, Implementation of Sections 551(c), (d), and (e) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, ET Docket No. 97-206, Report and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 11248 (1998).

⁴ The TVOMB was intended to “provide information to producers and other program distributors concerning the [TV Parental] Guidelines, as well as address complaints and requests from the public about the Guidelines and their implementation.” *Implementation of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019; Report on Television Ratings and The Oversight Monitoring Board*, MB Docket No. 19-41, Report, 34 FCC Rcd 3205, 3207, para. 7 (MB 2019) (2019 Report). There are up to 24 members of the TVOMB at any given time: the chairman (a position held by the head of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), National Cable Television Association (now called NCTA – The Internet and Television Association) (NCTA), or the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) on a

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and developed the TV Parental Guidelines age ratings system that prevails today.⁵ The voluntary TV Parental Guidelines overseen by the TVOMB, if properly implemented, can be useful to ensure parents are adequately informed about video programming on television that their children may be exposed to.

The industry's system allows for the display of specific ratings for programs. Programs that are designed to be appropriate for all children, including very young ones, are rated TV-Y. Programs that are designed to be appropriate for children age 7 and above are rated TV-Y7. Programs that are not specifically designed for children but are nonetheless suitable for all ages are rated TV-G. The industry's system also includes ratings for TV-PG, TV-14, and TV-MA. The TV Parental Guidelines also allow content descriptors to be included with the rating, including descriptors to let parents know that programs have sexually suggested dialog (D), fantasy violence (FV), coarse or crude language (L), sexual situations (S), and / or violence (V).⁶ The 1996 law also required TV manufacturers to develop technology that allows parents to block material rated as violent, sexual, or otherwise flagged by the ratings system.⁷

Today, both the traditional broadcast TV sector, multichannel video programming distribution services (MVPDs) (i.e. cable and satellite), and streaming platforms use the voluntary ratings system. In recent years, however, significant concerns have been raised about the ratings system. For instance, commenters have raised concerns with the FCC about the accuracy of the ratings, the appropriateness of the ratings, and a shift or ratings creep in which mature, adult, or inappropriate content is being rated as appropriate for young children.⁸ The FCC wants to ensure that the ratings system continues to serve the purpose that Congress had in mind—empowering parents to make informed decisions for their children.

Recently, parents have raised concerns that controversial gender identity issues are being included or promoted in children's programs without providing any disclosure or transparency to parents. Specifically, the industry guidelines that parents rely on are rating shows with transgender and gender non-binary programming as appropriate for children and young children, and doing so without providing this information to parents, thereby undermining the ability of parents to make informed choices for their families. Consistent with Congress's vision for the ratings system, we seek comment on whether the industry's approach is continuing to provide the information that is relevant to parents today.

By passing the relevant legislation in 1996, Congress acted to protect the right of parents to decide when and how to discuss mature topics with their children, and to know if and when their children are being exposed to these topics in their TV viewing. Accordingly, we seek comment here on any changes that can or should be made to the current ratings system to ensure that it is responsive to the

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rotating basis), up to 18 industry representatives from the broadcast, cable and creative communities, and five non-profit members. *Id.* at 3208, para. 9. The TVOMB website currently identifies the following 16 entities as representatives: A+E Networks, AMC Networks, American Academy of Pediatrics, Boys & Girls Club of America, Entertainment Industries Council, Fox Corporation, MPAA, NAB, National PTA, NBCUniversal, NCTA, Paramount, TelevisaUnivision, The Walt Disney Company, and Warner Bros. Discovery. *See Abouts Us*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, <https://www.tvguidelines.org/aboutUs.html>. Thus, of the 16 members, half are media companies, and 4 are trade associations funded by media companies.

⁵ *Understanding the TV Ratings and Parental Controls*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, https://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/TV_Parental_Guidelines_Brochure.pdf. *See FCC, V-Chip: Putting Restrictions on What Your Children Watch*, <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/v-chip-putting-restrictions-what-your-children-watch>.

⁶ *Understanding the TV Ratings and Parental Controls*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, https://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/TV_Parental_Guidelines_Brochure.pdf.

⁷ Telecommunications Act, § 551.

⁸ *See generally 2019 Report*, 34 FCC Rcd at 3210-11, paras. 15-17.

issues that parents confront today. This includes any changes that may make sense for the TVOMB to ensure that it is representative of a range of family values. We also ask how ratings can be applied consistently across broadcast, MVPDs, and streaming platforms.

Under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019, Congress asked the Commission to report on the accuracy of the voluntary rating system and on the ability of the TVOMB to oversee the ratings system and address public concerns.⁹ Following public notice and comment,¹⁰ the Media Bureau submitted a report (2019 Report)¹¹ to the Committees on Appropriations of the House and Senate.

Accessibility and Transparency of TVOMB. In the 2019 Report, the Bureau made the following suggestions for Board and industry consideration related to increasing accessibility and transparency to the public and increasing awareness of the Board's role:¹²

- TVOMB should increase efforts to promote public awareness of TVOMB and its role in overseeing the rating system. As part of this suggestion, the Bureau urged TVOMB and industry to increase outreach efforts concerning the existence of the rating system and to consider additional ways to publicize the ability of the public to file complaints with TVOMB and provide instructions on how to file complaints.
- TVOMB should consider ways to inform the public of the number of complaints it receives, the nature of the complaints, the program and network or producer involved, and any action taken by TVOMB or the industry in response to the complaints. The Bureau noted that the Board could consider issuing an annual report on the complaints it has received, how they were adjudicated, and whether they led to the rating of a program being changed for future airings.
- TVOMB should hold at least one public meeting annually to seek direct public input.

Accuracy of TV Ratings System. The Bureau also made the following suggestions with regard to the accuracy of the ratings being applied pursuant to the TV Parental Guidelines:¹³

- TVOMB should consider random audits or spot checks to analyze the accuracy and consistency of the ratings in addition to the survey data it already collects.
- TVOMB should use this combined data to determine if any changes are needed to the ratings system to ensure they are as helpful as possible to viewers.

⁹ See Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019, Pub. L. No. 116-6, Explanatory Statement (H.R. Rep. No. 116-9, Division D, Title V, p. 673 (Conf. Rep.)), 133 Stat. 13 (2019). The explanatory statement in the Act provides: "The FCC is directed to report to the Committees on Appropriations of the House and Senate within 90 days of enactment of this Act on the extent to which the rating system matches the video content that is being shown and the ability of the TV Parental Guidelines Oversight Monitoring Board to address public concerns." *Id.*

¹⁰ See *Media Bureau Seeks Comment on the TV Ratings System and the Oversight Monitoring Board*, MB Docket. 19-41, Public Notice, 34 FCC Rcd 920 (MB 2019).

¹¹ See generally *2019 Report*, 34 FCC Rcd at 3205, para. 1.

¹² *Id.* at 3217-18, paras. 31-33.

¹³ *Id.* at 3218-19, para. 35.

We seek comment on whether and how the Bureau's suggestions, both regarding increased transparency of the TVOMB and accuracy of TV ratings, have been implemented.¹⁴ How does the TVOMB engage with the public and are the steps taken sufficient? Is the composition of the board sufficiently balanced to represent a broad range of stakeholders outside of the entertainment industry? What more could the board do to include family-oriented perspectives—which are not well represented in the media industry—in its ratings process? Should additional faith-based organizations be represented on the TVOMB?¹⁵ Does the current complaint process provide for meaningful public participation?

Is the general public aware of the ratings system and how to provide feedback to the TVOMB? Is the general public aware that the V-chip can be used with the ratings system to block unwanted video programming from reaching children? Do descriptions of the content provide a sufficient basis for parents to make informed decisions concerning viewing decisions for their family, including when gender identity themes are discussed or displayed?

Are parents aware that children watching programs rated TV-Y, TV-Y7, and TV-G may contain the discussion or promotion of gender identity themes?¹⁶ Should such programming be rated differently or contain relevant descriptions so that parents can make informed decisions?

Is there disparity in ratings among different viewing platforms; i.e., is the same program consistently rated when it airs on broadcasting, MVPDs, and streaming platforms? Are streaming platforms more broadly interpreting what is allowable in categories intended for audiences under TV-Y14? Is objectionable content rated consistently across various programmers? For example, do different networks rate explicit language, suggestive language, and violent programming similarly, or are some networks prone to provide a lesser rating than others?

¹⁴ We note that the TVOMB has issued annual reports from 2019 to 2025, *see TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board Releases 2025 Annual Report*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, Press Release (Mar. 31, 2026), https://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/Release_033126.pdf, and has made efforts to develop best practices for the application of parental guidelines to streaming services. *See Ratings Best Practices Guidance for Streaming Services*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, (2024) https://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/RatingsBestPracticesGuidanceForStreamingServices_2024.pdf. The most recent annual report identified only 11 pieces of public correspondence relevant to the board's work, four of which involved streaming services. Spot checks revealed only two instances that required ratings changes. *See Annual Report 2025*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board https://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/TV_Parental_Guidelines_2025AnnualReport.pdf.

¹⁵ *See, e.g., Statement on Overcoming the Exploitation of Sex and Violence in Communications from the U.S. Catholic Bishops*, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/renewing-mind-media-sex-violence-exploitation> (stating that “prominent creative people have indicated reservations about the suitability for their own families of a good deal of what they see and hear today, even among their own creations”).

¹⁶ TV-Y rated programming is “designed to be appropriate for all children. Whether animated or live-action, the themes and elements in this program are specifically designed for a very young audience, including children from ages 2-6. This program is not expected to frighten younger children.” TV-Y7 programming is “designed for children age 7 and above. It may be more appropriate for children who have acquired the developmental skills needed to distinguish between make-believe and reality. Themes and elements in this program may include mild fantasy violence or comedic violence, or may frighten children under the age of 7. Therefore, parents may wish to consider the suitability of this program for their very young children. TV-Y7-FV rated programs include “fantasy violence [that] may be more intense or more combative than other programs in the TV-Y7 category.” *See Understanding the TV Ratings and Parental Controls*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, https://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/TV_Parental_Guidelines_Brochure.pdf.

We seek comment on whether outreach efforts have been successful in providing parents with the information necessary to use the guidelines effectively and to provide feedback to the TVOMB.¹⁷ Commenters should identify the specific recommendation from the 2019 Report about which they are commenting. Comments should include any surveys or data used to support the comments.

Filing Requirements - Comments and Replies. Interested parties may file comments and reply comments on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this document. Comments may be filed using the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS).

- Electronic Filers: Comments may be filed electronically using the Internet by accessing the ECFS: <https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs>.
- Paper Filers: Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and one copy of each filing. Filings can be sent by hand or messenger delivery, by commercial courier, or by the U.S. Postal Service. **All filings must be addressed to the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission.**
 - Hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary are accepted between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. by the FCC's mailing contractor at 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701. All hand deliveries must be held together with rubber bands or fasteners. Any envelopes and boxes must be disposed of before entering the building.
 - Commercial courier deliveries (any deliveries not by the U.S. Postal Service) must be sent to 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701.
 - Filings sent by U.S. Postal Service First-Class Mail, Priority Mail, and Priority Mail Express must be sent to 45 L Street NE, Washington, DC 20554.

Ex Parte Rules. The proceeding this Notice initiates shall be treated as a "permit-but-disclose" proceeding in accordance with the Commission's *ex parte* rules.¹⁸ Persons making *ex parte* presentations must file a copy of any written presentation or a memorandum summarizing any oral presentation within two business days after the presentation (unless a different deadline applicable to the Sunshine period applies). Persons making oral *ex parte* presentations are reminded that memoranda summarizing the presentation must (1) list all persons attending or otherwise participating in the meeting at which the *ex parte* presentation was made, and (2) summarize all data presented and arguments made during the presentation.

If the presentation consisted in whole or in part of the presentation of data or arguments already reflected in the presenter's written comments, memoranda, or other filings in the proceeding, the presenter may provide citations to such data or arguments in his or her prior comments, memoranda, or other filings (specifying the relevant page and/or paragraph numbers where such data or arguments can be found) in lieu of summarizing them in the memorandum. Documents shown or given to Commission staff during *ex parte* meetings are deemed to be written *ex parte* presentations and must be filed consistent with rule 1.1206(b). Written *ex parte* presentations and memoranda summarizing oral *ex parte*

¹⁷ We note that the most recent annual report, identified only 12 pieces of public correspondence relevant to the board's work, six of which involved streaming services. Spot checks revealed only three instances that required ratings changes. See *Annual Report 2025*, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board https://www.tvguidelines.org/resources/TV_Parental_Guidelines_2025AnnualReport.pdf.

¹⁸ 47 CFR § 1.1206.

presentations, and all attachments thereto, must, when feasible, be filed through the electronic comment filing system in the docket established for this proceeding, and must be filed in their native format (e.g., .doc, .xml, .ppt, searchable .pdf). Participants in this proceeding should familiarize themselves with the Commission's *ex parte* rules.

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Availability of Documents. Comments, reply comments, and *ex parte* submissions will be publicly available online via ECFS. Documents will be available electronically in ASCII, Microsoft Word, and/or Adobe Acrobat.

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