

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *In the Matter of Violent Television Programming and Its Impact on Children*,
MB Docket No. 04-261

As I travel across the country talking with people about our nation's media, I consistently hear from parents about what their children are seeing on television. I hear many voices but one common refrain – parents are afraid of many of the images television sends, upset at the kinds of behavior certain programming seems to condone, and totally turned off by the extraordinary and escalating violence being broadcast into our living rooms.

Television is perhaps the most powerful force at work in the world today. When used for good, it can enlighten minds, convey powerful ideas, educate, and lay the foundation for human development. But when it is used to mislead, misrepresent and distort, it can – it does – inflict lasting harm. Most of the evidence amassed over the past half century indicates a relationship between gratuitous violence and harmful effects – personal, psychological and social. While research continues on how children are affected by what they watch, it seems close to indisputable that there are indeed unfortunate and negative outgrowths from the spreading virus of broadcast violence.

Congress requested the FCC to report on the issue and to develop some options for legislators to consider. This violence report is the Commission's response to that request. It surveys the problem, presents our considered "take" on the issue and develops several options for Congress to consider should it decide to develop legislation on the matter. It tees up such options as time channeling, viewer initiated blocking and mandatory ratings, as well as a la carte or bundling approaches in the cable and DBS context. Congress retains, of course, the prerogative to act, just as the judiciary has the prerogative of responding to legislation that is challenged in the courts. The instant report marries no one approach but instead responds to the request for analysis and options.

The facts are extraordinary and alarming. Children watch on average between two and four hours of television every day; young children are masters of the remote control; and they often watch television unsupervised. The research taken as a whole strongly suggests that children's constant exposure to violence on television can be desensitizing, damaging and even devastating to them and to society-at-large.

We all have important roles to play to protect our children from violent programming – parents, industry, the FCC, and Congress. Parents are of course the first line of defense, and without their active involvement it is difficult to envision a successful cure for the violence virus. Yet significant evidence indicates that no tools thus far available have been successful in containing the epidemic. This would include the V-chip, other control technologies and the existing television program ratings system. Industry's efforts have obviously not solved the problem and the preoccupation of some

media – especially large national conglomerates often more interested in selling products to young people than in removing violence from the airwaves – does not provide much confidence that it will move to solve the problem. Given the impact of gratuitous violence on children and the pervasiveness of this kind of programming in our homes, it becomes altogether appropriate for Congress and the Commission to address the issue.

I am pleased that the Commission unanimously concludes in today's report that it is appropriate for Congress to entertain action against program violence. Congress has the opportunity, should it choose to do so, to establish innovative, meaningful, and constitutional ways for safeguarding our children from violent programming when they are most likely to be in the viewing audience. As this issue continues to gather momentum, I hope we can have a dialogue across the nation on the challenges that will attend the various options we tee up today and others that Congress and others will no doubt suggest. This is the beginning, not the end, of the debate. I for one proceed acutely sensitive to the need for a carefully crafted approach. I want to see a solution that solves the problem without creating others. I recognize that it is not an easy challenge to develop rules that pass constitutional muster, but given what amounts to a public health crisis at hand, I believe it is a challenge that must be met. Serious and festering problems require solutions, so that the question here is not *whether* we should address the issue, but *how* we should address it. Working together – citizens, industry and government – there is simply no reason why we should not be able to find workable solutions.

Finally, I commend the Chairman and all my colleagues for supporting this report and for their helpful suggestions to make it better. I hope our action today will be an important first step in safeguarding our children from excessively violent television programming.