



January 12, 2007

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Dear Premier and Ministers

At the request of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation's (OSSTF's) Provincial Executive, I am writing this letter on behalf of the 60,000 members of OSSTF who work with Ontario's children and youth in our publicly funded education systems. OSSTF is very proud to be a member of a coalition on media violence initiated by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA). We commend OPSBA for establishing this coalition to research and develop strategies to deal with the issue of violence in the media. The coalition has grown since it was first struck and now includes the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Principals' Council, the Ontario Provincial Police, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and the Ontario Student Trustees' Association. The Ontario government has shown its support for the coalition's work through financial support from the Literacy Numeracy Secretariat. This letter is to request further support but in other ways.

The coalition is broadly based with a wealth and diversity of experience and expertise in the field of media literacy; what unites us is a strong desire to protect Ontario's children from the harmful effects of exposure to violent and sexually explicit images and recordings. Research links exposure to media violence to violent and aggressive behaviour. Young people spend a significant amount of time watching television, on the internet, listening to music and watching music videos, playing video games and communicating with peers, and even strangers, through various media. The coalition is taking a very proactive approach in developing tips for parents and resources for teachers, educators and for the broader educational community with a focus on preventing harmful exposure.

On January 17th, I will be taking part in a press conference along with Emily Noble, President of ETFO and Dr. Peter Jaffe. Coalition members will be in attendance at this event to be held in the Queen's Park media studio at 10:00 a.m. The press conference is intended to increase awareness of the issue, outline the coalition's projects, and call for legislative changes to enhance protection of young people. While most of the legislative changes being proposed deal with Federal legislation, support from your offices would send a clear message that this societal issue must be tackled at all levels.

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There are three specific areas in which we will be seeking legislative change and we are seeking your support in enacting these changes at the Provincial level and encouraging changes at the Federal level. Further rationale and background will be provided at the press conference. The three recommendations for legislative changes the coalition will make are as follows:

That the Federal Minister of Justice amend the Criminal Code hate incitement laws to conform to Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, thereby granting protection to girls and women. (This has been introduced as a private members bill by MP Borys Wrzesnewskyj, MP for Etobicoke Centre).

That the Federal government amend the Broadcasting Act to establish a watershed hour of 9:00 p.m., applicable to both radio and television, for material intended for adult audiences to limit exposure to violence by young people.

That provincial governments should introduce a legislated age-based classification system for music recordings similar to the system that currently exists for films and video games.

Awareness is critical. We hope and trust the Ontario government will not only support and encourage Federal legislative amendments but will also lead by example within Ontario. We would welcome further dialogue on other proactive ways in which this issue can be addressed here in Ontario. We applaud your government's initiatives with respect to safe schools, anti-bullying and character education which are consistent with the goals of the coalition on this issue and your respective positions and portfolios are central to addressing this societal issue. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



RHONDA KIMBERLEY-YOUNG
President, OSSTF/FEESO

c.c. Media Violence Coalition Members
Wayne Samuelson, President, OFL
Hilda Watkins, President, OTF
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