Each year, the Parents Television Council (PTC) is driven by the generosity of an invaluable community of philanthropic partners across the nation who are committed to protecting children from today’s toxic media. Your financial contributions are the vital wellspring of resources which enable the PTC to achieve our goals, and you are integral to our success as the most influential media watchdog organization in America.

With profound gratitude, we are delighted to share this report highlighting the many achievements you made possible in 2019. Your continued support made a direct, positive impact on the mission and vision of the Parents Television Council, and established the groundwork for our critical advocacy in the new digital media environment of the twenty-first century.

Thank You for Your Support!
PTC SECURES THE FIRST FEDERAL OVERSIGHT REPORT ON THE TV CONTENT RATINGS SYSTEM

Over a decade of research by the Parents Television Council demonstrates how the television networks deliberately employ an inaccurate, inconsistent TV content ratings system to market harmful material to our children. They do so to help build a larger viewing audience and to charge advertisers more money. And while the networks fill their coffers with advertising revenue, they simultaneously flood the public airwaves with graphic sex, violence and profanity which is labeled appropriate for family viewing.

The PTC is the only organization in the nation fighting to reform this deeply flawed ratings system and its pretended oversight. We worked collaboratively with Senator James Lankford (R-OK) and other lawmakers to craft legislative wording that ordered the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to conduct its first-ever regulatory review of the TV content ratings system. The President signed this legislation into law on February 15. Thousands of Americans filed comments with the FCC.

On May 16, the FCC publicly released a 15-page report to Congress which affirmed the failings and weaknesses in the ratings system – and the system’s ineffective oversight – that the PTC has proclaimed for years. This hard-hitting report states there have been sufficient complaints from the public about the accuracy of the ratings to justify additional action, and it specifically mentions the PTC 56 times. The report’s last words were perhaps most important: “We note the ratings system has not changed in over 20 years.”

Thanks to you, one of the most powerful regulatory agencies in the world acknowledged the need to improve the TV content ratings system and its oversight. In subsequent conversations with the FCC and lawmakers on Capitol Hill, the PTC has learned that Congress awaits a formal response from the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board – the entertainment industry-controlled body which oversees the ratings system – before determining the next legislative steps toward improvement and reform.

Since the FCC completed its report six months ago, the Monitoring Board has failed to take any meaningful action toward improving the ratings system or its oversight. It is clear that Hollywood will fight to keep the power to decide and rate what is shown in every living room across America. The FCC Report must serve as a catalyst for positive changes, and the PTC will leverage the report and our latest research data on the TV content ratings (see next section) with lawmakers in Washington D.C. to call for a Congressional hearing or a symposium to investigate the ratings system.
TELEVISION RESEARCH: EXPOSING CONTENT
HOLLYWOOD APPROVES FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Hundreds of studies by leading medical and public health organizations over several decades have shown that exposure to graphic sex, violence and profanity on television can have harmful, long-lasting effects on a child’s healthy development. Each year the Parents Television Council analyzes emerging trends in entertainment television to keep parents informed of the kinds of programming which are marketed to children and teens.

In July, the PTC released the report “Not for Kids Anymore: Comic Book-Themed Primetime Broadcast Network Programming Unsafe for Children”. In this seven-year examination of 293 episodes about comic book characters, the PTC found viewers were exposed to over 6,000 incidents of violence, more than 500 deaths, and nearly 2,000 profanities among other adult content. Notably, the CW network’s series Riverdale, based on the popular Archie Comics, featured 242 instances of violence; 153 profanities and scenes of casual drug use, and 78 instances of sexual content. Whereas Archie Comics’ reputation is of clean teens having wholesome fun, Riverdale showed the main character Archie having sex in the back seat of a car with his school teacher.

Despite such adult material, Riverdale is rated TV-14 (appropriate for 14-year-old children) and airs on the broadcast networks when millions of children are watching television. The data from this study conclusively demonstrate the TV networks continue to rate explicit content as suitable for children, and the PTC is calling on broadcast television executives and creative artists to reverse this disturbing trend towards graphic gore using characters created for children.
What a Difference a Decade Makes

Despite the increasing volume and degree of explicit material, Hollywood tells parents the TV content ratings are the best line of defense between children and inappropriate content. Created half a generation before the iPhone, Google or Netflix, the 22-year-old TV content ratings system has never been modernized or updated. All prime-time broadcast TV programming is either rated TV-14 (appropriate for 14-year-old children) or TV-PG (suitable for even younger children).

Because most parents are familiar with the movie ratings, they have expectations of the meanings of the TV content ratings. But “PG” on TV does not mean the same thing as “PG” in movies. In October, the PTC released the new study “A Decade of Deceit: How TV Content Ratings Have Failed Families” which found substantially more profanity and violence in youth-rated shows now than ten years ago. **On average, there was 28 percent more violence and 43.5 percent more profanity on shows rated TV-PG in 2017-18 than in 2007-08. Additionally, there was over 150 percent more violence and 62 percent more profanity in total on programs rated TV-14 in 2017-18 than ten years ago.**

Scenes of decapitation and dismemberment as well as dialogue with words including asshole, bastard, bitch and dick received the same PG content rating as the enormously popular children’s films, like *Shrek* and *Finding Dory*. This study proved again that parents cannot rely on the TV content ratings system that labels graphic content appropriate for children. With the release of this report, the PTC is urgently calling on Congress to ensure the ratings system, and the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board which is responsible for overseeing the ratings, are overhauled to accurately reflect the realities of today’s toxic entertainment media landscape.
PTC SCORES FIRST VICTORY IN THE NEW STREAMING MEDIA BATTLEFRONT

Digital technology has created a landmark shift in how consumers – especially children – access entertainment programming. Children and teens increasingly use handheld mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, to instantly “stream” TV programs and other video from the internet.

Popular streaming services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime Video have greater leeway to air more explicit material because they are not regulated by the Federal Communications Commission, nor are they subject to pressure from corporate advertisers. As a result, children are at greater risk of exposure to inappropriate content when they watch programs on mobile devices away from their parents’ supervision. In 2019, the PTC broadened its core mission to closely monitor the streaming video landscape for harmful material which targets children and teens.

Netflix is marketing and distributing several programs which are proven to be harmful to children and teens. Most disturbingly, Netflix’s teen drama 13 Reasons Why graphically depicted the lead female teen character committing suicide as revenge against the classmates who had assaulted her. Even with research funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and published last April in Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry which linked 13 Reasons Why to a 30 percent increase in suicides among children aged 10-17, Netflix preserved the gruesome suicide scene.

PTC Takes Fight to Netflix Leadership and Investors

Because Netflix was slow to react to this shocking study, thousands of PTC members and supporters sent letters and petitions to the company, demanding 13 Reasons Why be cancelled. PTC President Tim Winter appeared on Fox News as a guest of host Martha McCallum to discuss the program’s harm and to issue a warning to parents. Days prior to Netflix’s 2019 shareholder meeting, the PTC sent letters to CEO Reed Hastings and every member of the company’s Board of Directors calling on them publicly to “take immediate steps to protect children from a product that your company has placed into the stream of consciousness and which is linked to children taking their own lives.” In June, the PTC also attended Netflix’s shareholder meeting and asked Hastings how the company was prepared to address 13 Reasons Why in light of the NIH study.

Following this intense public campaign, on July 14 Netflix finally removed the suicide scene.
and publicly acknowledged its harmful impact on children. Additionally, Netflix shifted the third season of the program’s theme away from suicide and some of the darker messages and imagery. In August, Netflix announced *13 Reasons Why* would be canceled after its fourth season. This tremendous victory assures that no more children or teens will be exposed to the graphic suicide scene in *13 Reasons Why*. Because of your support, the PTC successfully pressured the world’s largest streaming video service to take measures toward protecting children from harmful material and demonstrate greater corporate responsibility. We will continue to examine the programming of the most popular streaming video services for harmful content that targets younger viewers, and publicly urge the companies to intensify their efforts to protect children.

**HOLDING CORPORATE SPONSORS ACCOUNTABLE FOR TV PROGRAM CONTENT**

The Parents Television Council continues to monitor advertiser-supported television for explicit content marketed to children and teens during primetime viewing hours. In May, ABC aired a trial episode of *Videos After Dark*, a spin-off of the successful family program *America’s Funniest Home Videos*. However, this “new” version of the popular show not only included the same host, Bob Saget, but featured vulgar and profane content disguised as humor. In the pilot episode, parents were shown filming their children and laughing when the kids mistakenly said explicit sexual words. This same episode also had six instances of the F-word (bleeped or partially bleeped), and 20 scenes with visual depictions of sexual behavior – including nude women and men with barely blurred genitals.

To pressure ABC into cancelling *Videos After Dark* immediately and not proceed with a full season of episodes, PTC members and supporters signed over a thousand petitions to the CEOs of the top 100 corporate TV advertisers in America such as AT&T, Apple, Coca-Cola, Ford Motor Co., McDonald’s, Target, T-Mobile and Verizon. These petitions emphasized how sponsoring *Videos After Dark* would violate corporate responsibility by harming children with sexual content and profanity, and urged the companies to refuse to sponsor the show. Shortly thereafter, ABC ceased its consideration of producing or airing any additional episodes of *Videos After Dark* for a full season. Last fall, NBC debuted *I Feel Bad*, a comedy about
working mom Emet and her career and personal dissatisfaction with her life. While employed at a video game company on a team of sex-crazed and socially inept men, she criticizes them for designing female characters with “bowling ball boobs” yet deliberately invites them to sexually harass her by asking, “Be honest: am I still do-able?” In reply, the men stammer about Emet’s “no longer” fresh face with one saying “I guess cold, week-old pizza is better than no pizza at all.” In another scene, Emet allowed her 9-year-old daughter to be in a dance line, and the girl rubbed against a boy’s midsection and allowed the boy to lift her legs so she can straddle him while he thrusted his crotch into her.

After the PTC contacted all of the show’s sponsors, many of the companies that had appeared on the premier episode did not return for subsequent episodes. Only one of the 20 advertisers the PTC contacted had returned, and that company was a local media buyer, not a national sponsor. On May 10, NBC announced I Feel Bad was not renewed for a second season.

PTC FIGHTS TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN ON DIGITAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The expertise of the Parents Television Council regarding the impact of media on children is often requested for issues beyond television and video programming. This year, the PTC learned that school children increasingly refuse to go out to play during recess so they can spend time on their smartphones engaged with social networking sites like Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram, and digital media platforms such as YouTube. This extremely disturbing trend compelled the PTC to join a bipartisan advocacy coalition to help protect children and teens from the risks of using these platforms.

Most American children and teens are constantly using digital media, and these platforms are addictive by their very design. In particular, lawmakers criticize popular
online children’s video games for selling “loot boxes” which contain digital items that make
the games easier to play. Without their parent's knowledge or consent, children make “micro-
transactions” and spend real money to improve their chance of success in the games. There is
growing concern that video game loot boxes and micro-transactions expose children to a form of
gambling which could become an addiction.

The PTC is committed to safeguard every child from the inherent dangers of today’s digital media
environment. In a bipartisan partnership with Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO), Senator Ed Markey
(D-MA), Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and more than a dozen like-minded organizations,
the PTC is working to craft solutions to this controversial video game practice.

PTC LEADS CAMPAIGN TO ALLOW FAMILIES TO FILTER CONTENT FROM STREAMING VIDEO

In 2005, the Parents Television Council advocated for the bipartisan Family
Movie Act, giving families the right to use technology on DVD
players to skip past any sexual, violent, profane
or other explicit content from
movies they choose to watch in
their own homes.

Today, DVD use is declining and
most families use streaming video
services like Netflix, Hulu and
Amazon Prime Video. The same
filtering technology deployed on
DVD players also exists to filter
offensive material from streaming
video platforms. Sadly, Disney
and other Hollywood studios have
attempted to sue into bankruptcy
the companies that provide this
technology. It is ironic that a
company named after Walt Disney
and renowned for family-friendly
entertainment would sue to prohibit
parents from blocking sex, violence and
profanity from movies.

If Hollywood has its way, families will never have access to this kind of filtering technology, even
though it would potentially bring millions of dollars in additional revenue to the studios. The PTC
is committed to defeating Hollywood’s opposition to filtering technology that helps families, and
we are leading a pro-family coalition urging Congress to amend the Family Movie Act so that
parents can filter harmful and explicit material from streaming video. This would give parents
the ultimate level of control required to protect children from inappropriate digital content in the
twenty-first century.
PTC FORCES COMPROMISE ON “KID VID” RULES FOR CHILDREN’S PROGRAMMING

Many parents fondly remember growing up watching TV on Saturday mornings, when they enjoyed wholesome cartoons and the beloved Schoolhouse Rock animated musical segment taught them important lessons. Since 1990, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) “Kid Vid” rules have required all television stations to air at least three hours per week of educational and informational programs for children. But in response to pressure from the broadcast networks last year, the FCC moved to consider weakening or eliminating the Kid Vid rules because broadcasters said they had become “burdensome”, “ineffective” and “unnecessary”.

During the FCC’s review of the proposed weakening to the Kid Vid rules, the PTC publicly refuted the self-serving arguments of the broadcast industry and stressed the broadcaster’s obligation to “serve the public interest” and abide by the Kid Vid rules as a fair consideration for the free use of the publicly-owned airwaves. While prime time broadcast television programming may not be safe for children, the networks have been trying to eliminate the precious few remaining hours of TV which are federally mandated for the educational and informational needs of children.

In July, the FCC approved changes to the Kid Vid rules that allowed television stations to be more flexibility in scheduling children’s programming. But the core of the Kid Vid rules, which mandate that stations must air an average of three hours per week of programs to meet the educational and information needs of children, was retained. This compromise not only ensures that broadcasters continue to air programs beneficial to children, but also that the needs of lower-income families – which may not be able to afford expensive internet-delivered content and therefore must rely on free, over-the-air broadcast television – are served.