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*The nation's most influential advocacy organization
protecting children against sex, violence and profanity in entertainment*

July 12, 2022

Mr. Ted Sarandos
Chief Executive Officer, Netflix Inc.
5808 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90028

Dear Mr. Sarandos:

Without a question, Netflix has a hit on its hands with *Stranger Things*. The entertainment news media is abuzz over the large viewership numbers for Season 4 of the series. While such a feat is to be congratulated, we at the Parents Television and Media Council are deeply troubled by the age-based content rating that Netflix has assigned to the program. For the reasons described below, we call on Netflix immediately to change the content rating to TV-MA from its current rating of TV-14; or in the alternative, to remove the graphic content such that a TV-14 moniker is appropriate.

An informed and educated parent is the first and last line of defense when it comes to protecting children from harmful, explicit and age-inappropriate entertainment content. And while it is not, by itself, a panacea for safety, the most fundamental protective tool for parents is an age-based content rating. We are heartened that Netflix uses content ratings for its programming – albeit in a slightly-convoluted way, with some programs given a rating based on the Motion Picture Association (MPA) system, and others given a rating based on the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board (TVOMB) system. The *Stranger Things* franchise uses the latter system.

Our research report entitled *Stranger and More Explicit Things* – a copy of which is attached – suggests that the volume and degree of graphic content included in Season 4 of the series warrants a TV-MA rating. The current TV-14 rating deceives parents and exposes children to age-inappropriate violence and profanity. Please consider the following statistical findings related to *Stranger Things*:

- A 307% increase in violence from season 1 to season 4. Of note, season 4's first episode contains depictions of dead children.
- A 705% increase in graphic violence from season 1 to season 4.
- A 217% increase in profanity from season 1 to season 4.
- A 739% increase in the frequency of the word "sh*t" from season 1 to season 4. [Note: I've censored the explicit language in this letter, but it is entirely *uncensored* in the program.]
- *Stranger Things* did not introduce the "f-word" until part-way through its second season, but then used it six times in season 2, and five times in season 3, and nine times in season 4. It is useful here to remember that under the TVOMB content ratings system, the use of a single "f-word" on basic cable and expanded-basic cable television programming has traditionally triggered a "TV-MA" content rating. And on broadcast television and radio, a single use of the "f-word" has run afoul of indecency laws enforced by the Federal Communications Commission.

Either the program content for Season 4 is being rated inaccurately, or between Season 1 and Season 4 there has been considerable “ratings creep” with the criteria used to determine an age-based rating. Neither option allows parents to do their job effectively.

The TVOMB rating system offers content descriptors such as D for suggestive dialogue, L for coarse language, S for sexual content and V for violence. No such descriptors are being used by Netflix, but it should endeavor to do so.

Parents deserve a ratings system that is transparent and consistent across platforms. Our report suggests there to be a vastly different standard between streaming content and broadcast content – even if that content is similarly-rated. If a TV-14 doesn’t mean the same thing on Netflix as it does on CBS, it is of little to no value to parents.

We respectfully but urgently call on you either to change the content rating of Stranger Things – at least its most recent and 4th season – to TV-MA, or in the alternative to remove the graphic content such that a TV-14 moniker is appropriate; and to adopt content descriptors for all Netflix programming.

Sincerely,



Timothy F. Winter
President

cc: Mr. Charles Rivkin
Chairman and CEO, Motion Picture Association, and
Chairman, TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board