

2019

ANNUAL REPORT

THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES
MONITORING BOARD

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A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Today's television landscape represents the best content, production value and variety in history. The availability of high-quality programming and an ever-growing number of viewing choices for all audiences is a testament to the creativity of the U.S. television industry. But not all programming is appropriate for children, and the vast array of available programming makes monitoring what kids watch a more daunting, and important, task. The television industry is committed to helping parents make the best viewing choices for their families.



The TV ratings empower parents to have confidence in making choices about what programming is suitable for their homes and their families.”

Since 1996, the TV Parental Guidelines (also called the TV ratings) have provided parents with valuable information about the content and age-appropriateness of TV shows. The TV Parental Guidelines are modeled after the familiar movie ratings and are easily recognizable and simple to use. Used by themselves, or in conjunction with parental control technology such as the V-Chip in televisions or cable set top boxes, TV ratings are a useful tool for busy parents who are trying to ensure that their children watch suitable content. Day in and day out, a dedicated group of program production and distribution executives rate thousands of hours of video programming, expending substantial resources to ensure that shows receive an appropriate rating before they air. The TV ratings empower parents to have confidence in making choices about what programming is suitable for their homes and their families.

As the current chairman of the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board (Monitoring Board), I am proud to work with a team of dedicated television industry professionals as well as third-party public interest representatives to educate the public about the TV ratings and to help ensure that ratings are applied to video programs on a consistent basis. The Monitoring Board regularly commissions surveys of parents (the next survey is slated for 2020) to ascertain whether they are aware of the TV ratings and whether they find the ratings to be useful. The most recent survey (completed in 2018) found that:

- 90 percent of parents are aware of the TV ratings system;
- Nearly 95 percent of parents are satisfied with the accuracy of ratings for TV shows;
- Approximately 88 percent of parents find the TV ratings system helpful;
- Three in four parents report using the TV ratings often or sometimes; and
- More than 75 percent of parents maintain a favorable opinion about the TV ratings system.

In this first annual report of the Monitoring Board, I invite you to explore the activities we have undertaken this year to increase public awareness of TV ratings and parental controls and to address public input that we have received. As we look ahead to next year, the Monitoring Board stands ready to build on these initiatives to ensure that we continue to provide parents with useful information about TV programs.

On behalf of the members of the Monitoring Board, I thank you for your ongoing interest in making the TV Parental Guidelines even more valuable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Powell", written over a horizontal line.

Michael Powell
Chairman of the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board
President and CEO of NCTA – The Internet & Television Association

BACKGROUND

**ON THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES
AND MONITORING BOARD**

THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES were created in 1996 to help parents make informed decisions about what programs are suitable for their children. Designed by leading organizations of the TV industry, in consultation with representatives of a broad range of children's, medical and other interested stakeholders, the TV ratings are easily recognizable and easy to use. The ratings work in conjunction with parental control technology such as the V-Chip, built into most televisions, as well as cable set top boxes, allowing parents to block programs they determine to be inappropriate for their families.

TV RATINGS

THE MONITORING BOARD IS COMPRISED OF UP TO 24 MEMBERS: the chairman (the head of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), NCTA – The Internet & Television Association (NCTA) or the Motion Picture Association (MPA) on a rotating basis), as many as 18 industry members from the broadcast, cable and creative communities appointed by the NAB, NCTA or MPA and up to five third-party groups with an interest in children and media appointed by the Monitoring Board chairman. The current chairman, Michael Powell, president and CEO of NCTA, was appointed January 1, 2019 to a two-year term.

Current members of the Monitoring Board are:

- ABC
- A+E Networks
- AMC Networks
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Call for Action
- CBS
- Discovery, Inc.
- Entertainment Industries Council
- Fox Corporation
- Hulu
- Lifetime Networks
- National PTA
- NBC Universal
- Sony Pictures Entertainment
- Turner Broadcasting System
- Univision
- Viacom Media Networks

In late 2018, Congress requested that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issue a report evaluating (1) whether TV programming is accurately rated, and (2) whether the Monitoring Board has proven capable of overseeing the ratings system and responding to any public concerns. After reviewing extensive feedback in response to a call for public comment, the FCC released its report to the public on May 16, 2019. As part of its report, the FCC recommended that the Monitoring Board take steps to promote public awareness of the TV ratings and to be more transparent about the Monitoring Board's work. The FCC also encouraged the board to evaluate whether the TV ratings are being applied in an accurate and consistent manner. The Monitoring Board took this report and the feedback gathered as part of the FCC's review extremely seriously. Among the results is the publication of this first-ever annual report, which details various ways in which the Monitoring Board has worked to increase transparency and accountability, as well as to establish a formal spot check process to review the accuracy of ratings.

OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

REBRAND AND RELAUNCH OF THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES WEBSITE

Communication is at the core of the TV Parental Guidelines. Since its inception, the Monitoring Board and other industry representatives have worked to provide information to the public, particularly parents, about the TV ratings and parental controls. The TV Parental Guidelines website (tvguidelines.org) has served as an effective hub for information about the TV ratings system. In addition to educating visitors about the TV ratings and parental controls, the site also provides information about how to contact the Monitoring Board with questions or concerns about the rating of a television program, the history of the TV Parental Guidelines and research and data about the TV ratings system.

This year, the Monitoring Board completed a comprehensive update of its website to improve and enhance its effectiveness as the primary communications channel for the TV Parental Guidelines. Along with the website refresh came a rebrand of the TV Parental Guidelines logo which was captured in the new site. The new site features an updated look and feel, better organized information to improve the user experience and enhanced functionality. The Monitoring Board also implemented several changes to expand the reach of the website and to connect with a broader audience, including making the website accessible for both English and Spanish audiences. Additional features of the website include:

- Details about how to contact the Monitoring Board via email, phone* or through the mail;
- Mobile-friendly navigation;
- Streamlined information about the TV ratings and parental controls;
- A downloadable fact sheet on the TV ratings system;
- Downloadable “web stickers” featuring the TV Parental Guidelines logo to encourage organizations and stakeholders to easily link to the website as a resource; and
- Recent press releases and details about the latest parent survey research.

*As part of its effort to promote greater public awareness of the TV ratings, the Monitoring Board reestablished a telephone line in 2019 to allow the public to provide ratings feedback via phone calls as well as by mail and email.



NATIONAL PTA CONVENTION AND EXPO

For 120 years, the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA) has been a strong advocate for public education. National PTA works with families, students, teachers, administrators and business and community leaders to ensure the educational success of children and promote family engagement in schools. As the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the U.S., National PTA is at the forefront of children and youth issues.

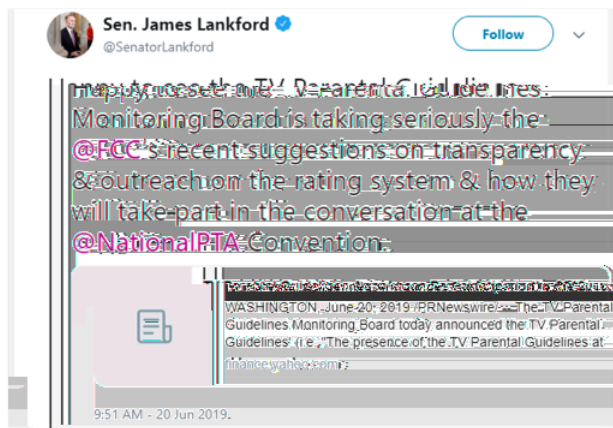


Nathan R. Monell, CAE, executive director of National PTA and a member of the Monitoring Board, visits with TV Parental Guidelines staff during the 2019 National PTA Convention and Expo in Columbus, Ohio.

Since the inception of the TV Parental Guidelines, National PTA has been a valued partner and has served on the Monitoring Board since 1997. In this role, National PTA has helped educate the public about the TV ratings system and ensured that the ratings provide valuable information to parents.

For the past 15 years, the Monitoring Board has participated in the annual National PTA Convention and Expo as a way to further promote the TV Parental Guidelines to educators and parents. This year, the Monitoring Board deepened its presence and participation in the Convention and Expo, which was held June 20-23 in Columbus, Ohio. Representatives of the Monitoring Board hosted an expanded informational booth on the Expo floor. The booth, with new signage and a prominent floor location, enjoyed solid attendance from Convention and Expo attendees who also took advantage of the Monitoring Board's on-site comment box to leave feedback on the TV ratings system. Attendees expressed appreciation for the TV ratings and parental controls and were pleased to receive information to take back to their respective hometowns and schools. Many requested extra TV ratings fact sheets to distribute at their state PTA conferences or asked about how they could link to the TV Parental Guidelines website on their community Facebook pages.

Both in advance of the Convention and Expo and following the event, the Monitoring Board reached out to attendees in order to generate more attention for TV Parental Guidelines and its presence at the annual gathering. After the Convention and Expo, the Monitoring Board followed up with attendees to thank them for visiting the booth and to share ways for stakeholders to further disseminate information about the TV Parental Guidelines, including linking to the TV Parental Guidelines website and distributing the TV ratings fact sheet at back to school nights or other school programs.



As a way of further educating the public about the TV Parental Guidelines and its work with National PTA, the Monitoring Board publicized its participation in the Convention and Expo through a widely distributed press release. The release included quotes from Chairman Powell and Nathan R. Monell, CAE, executive director of National PTA and a member of the Monitoring Board since 2015.

CALL FOR ACTION INTERVIEW

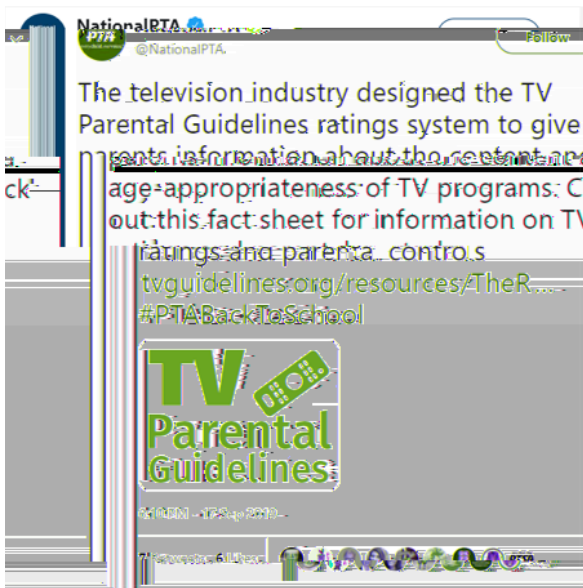
On September 8, Monitoring Board Member Elizabeth Casey, executive vice president and associate general counsel of Fox Corporation, was interviewed on behalf of the TV Parental Guidelines on Call for Action's Federal News Radio program, "Of Consuming Interest." Call for Action is a nonprofit organization devoted to empowering consumers by giving them a voice larger than their own and has been a public interest member of the Monitoring Board since 2017.

Casey was interviewed by Shirley Rooker, President of Call for Action, for a segment entitled "Get to Know the V-Chip." The segment focused on the TV ratings system and parental controls – educating listeners on how to use these resources and the behind-the-scenes work that goes into rating television programming.

The full interview can be found at <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/of-consuming-interest/2019/09/get-to-know-the-v-chip/>

BACK-TO-SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

In August, the Monitoring Board spotlighted the TV Parental Guidelines as part of a Back-to-School messaging effort. The effort encouraged parents and educators to utilize and promote the TV ratings system as their children got back into the swing of the school year. The Monitoring Board issued a press release that included links to the TV Parental Guidelines website and resources as well as recommendations for how parents and educators can spread the word about the TV ratings and parental controls on their respective social media channels and within their schools and communities.



The Monitoring Board also partnered with the National PTA during its own Back-to-School campaign in September, providing informational content for National PTA to distribute across its various online platforms. National PTA included the TV ratings fact sheet in the “From Our Partners” section of the Back-to-School parents’ resource page on its website and also tweeted about the TV ratings fact sheet on “Parent’s Day” (September 17) during National PTA’s Back-to-School week campaign.

RATINGS ACCURACY

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the Monitoring Board agreed to explore the establishment of a spot check review process to internally assess whether television programs are receiving accurate and consistent ratings across different networks and time slots.

With an eye toward formally launching the spot check review process in 2020, the Monitoring Board's network representatives developed a format for the undertaking and tested the process in September and October of this year. For the pilot phase, the network representatives divided into two groups, each comprised of a mix of broadcast and cable network representatives. For the 2020 roll-out, the Monitoring Board plans to establish four groups, with one meeting each calendar quarter. The Monitoring Board's public interest board members will be assigned to one of the four groups and will participate in the spot check program throughout 2020, allowing the process to take into account broader perspectives and feedback.

In order to ensure that the spot checks review a wide variety of content and intended audiences, programming will be selected from each of the participating representatives' networks at a predetermined time on a specific day each calendar quarter. For example, during the test phase, programming that aired at 8 p.m. EST on Tuesday, September 10 was reviewed. For the spot check review that takes place throughout 2020, each of the four groups will review programs that air on networks of other group members during specific time slots. Over the course of the year, the groups will be assigned to review programs that air at various times of day and that are intended to target various types of audiences. For instance, one group will review programming that airs during early morning which is often intended for younger children, another will review daytime programming, a third will review content that airs during primetime and the final group will review late night programs which are typically intended for adult audiences.

For the test phase of the spot check review, after each group member viewed his or her assigned program, the groups met to discuss the ratings that were applied to each reviewed program. Ratings were evaluated in the same way that a group member would evaluate her or his own network programming, including with respect to the content of the program and the content descriptors included with the rating. For the overwhelming majority of programs reviewed during the test phase, reviewers agreed with the ratings assigned. In one instance, the feedback provided as part of the review resulted in a network agreeing to modify its rating from TV-PG to TV-14 for a program.

Following the test phase of the spot check review, representatives from both review groups shared their thoughts on the ratings and the process during the Monitoring Board's annual meeting on October 29. During the meeting, the Monitoring Board discussed the accuracy of the ratings on the programming that was reviewed and explored ways to streamline the spot check review process for 2020. Going forward, should a group determine that it disagrees with the rating assigned to a given program, a dialogue will be initiated with the network that airs the program. If the network disagrees with the review group's determination, the matter will be brought to the Monitoring Board chairman to determine appropriate next steps, including consideration before the full Monitoring Board, which has the authority to adjudicate disputes in the event that consensus discussion does not resolve the question.

The Monitoring Board is eager to launch the spot check review process in 2020 and will continue to report summaries of the results in future annual reports. The Monitoring Board continues to believe that TV ratings overwhelmingly are being applied on an accurate and consistent basis. Mindful of the FCC's recommendation, however, the Monitoring Board acknowledges that spot checks can be a useful tool in confirming this belief, while also bringing to the attention of the Monitoring Board those rare instances where ratings may be inaccurate so that they can be addressed. In the event that the spot check review uncovers any trend or pattern of errors that warrants further attention, the Monitoring Board will take appropriate action.



ANNUAL MEETING

ON OCTOBER 29, 2019, Monitoring Board Chairman Michael Powell and NCTA hosted the 2019 annual meeting of the Monitoring Board. The purpose of the annual meeting is to bring together Monitoring Board members to review yearly activities, discuss correspondence and ratings complaints and plan for the year ahead. The annual meeting supplements multiple informal meetings in which Monitoring Board members gather – either in person or by phone – throughout the year to discuss ongoing work. The following presents an overview of the 2019 annual meeting.

REVIEW OF 2019 ACTIVITIES

To begin the 2019 annual meeting, the Monitoring Board extensively discussed the beforementioned FCC report along with the efforts to respond to the FCC recommendations. The Monitoring Board specifically reviewed various activities completed in 2019, which aimed to promote public awareness and increase transparency about the TV Parental Guidelines. Among these efforts were the launch of the new, mobile-friendly website in both English and Spanish; the rebrand of the TV Parental Guidelines logo; the publication of a revised and downloadable fact sheet; the reestablishment of a telephone line for viewer feedback; and the creation of downloadable web stickers. The Monitoring Board also discussed the TV Parental Guidelines' booth at the 2019 National PTA Convention and Expo, which included new, enhanced signage, a comments box and a joint press release with National PTA. Finally, the Monitoring Board reviewed participation in a Back-to-School messaging effort, the interview with Call for Action and the test phase for the ratings accuracy spot check.

More information about these specific activities can be found on pages 8-13 of this report.

RATINGS SPOT CHECK REVIEW PROGRAM

After reviewing the test phase for the spot check review process, the Monitoring Board agreed to launch a comprehensive spot check review program for 2020. As previously described, the goal of the spot check review will be to confirm the Monitoring Board's belief that TV ratings overwhelmingly are being applied on an accurate and consistent basis, while also identifying instances where ratings may be inaccurate so that they can be addressed. During the meeting, the Monitoring Board discussed lessons learned during the test phase in order to improve the framework for the official launch in 2020.

More information about the spot check review program can be found on pages 14-15 of this report.

PRESENTATION BY PATRICIA VANCE OF ESRB

Patricia Vance, President of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), joined the meeting as a guest speaker to provide an overview for the Monitoring Board on how ESRB rates apps and video games. In addition to her role at ESRB, Ms. Vance is the founding Chairperson of the International Age Rating Coalition (IARC) and is Chairperson of the Family Online Safety Institute. The informative presentation touched on the specifics of how video game content is rated, how ratings are reviewed, and how ratings are depicted as part of video game marketing. Following her presentation, the Monitoring Board engaged with Ms. Vance in a lengthy question and answer session. The purpose of Ms. Vance's presentation was to give the Monitoring Board additional perspective regarding how ratings work is conducted in a related industry so that Monitoring Board members can ensure that they are continuing to apply best practices and to improve the TV ratings wherever possible.

REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Prior to the annual meeting, a summary of all correspondence and complaints received by the Monitoring Board since the previous meeting was shared with members. During the meeting, Monitoring Board members reviewed the year's emails, phone calls and letters. As has been the case for several years, the majority of correspondence received was related to commercials, the subject matter of program content or scheduling changes.

More information about complaints and correspondence can be found on pages 23-26 of this report.

PREVIEW OF 2020 ACTIVITIES

In addition to committing to formally launch the spot check review program, the Monitoring Board agreed to explore opportunities to raise greater awareness of the TV Parental Guidelines online, continue to be more visible through press outreach and events and to effectively communicate with viewers.



**2019
CORRESPONDENCE
SUMMARY**

One of the primary roles of the Monitoring Board is to address complaints about the ratings on specific programs. The Monitoring Board does this by reviewing complaints and other correspondence, facilitating discussion about the application of the ratings and working to resolve concerns before they become widespread. Over the past dozen years, the Monitoring Board has received, on average, 300 viewer comments per year (a relatively small number of those comments have been complaints about the rating of a particular program). The remaining comments cover a broad range of topics including general research questions, requests for a show to be put back on the air (or questions about a network's program schedule) and questions and comments about commercials.

As of December 31, 2019, the Monitoring Board received 242 public comments – three letters, 42 phone calls and 197 emails. Out of all of this correspondence, there were 51 complaints about commercials, 77 complaints about the general content or casting of shows, 37 complaints about scheduling changes and 18 complaints specifically about ratings. The other 59 pieces of correspondence included questions from content creators about ratings applications, viewers offering positive feedback on programming, marketing requests, employment questions, viewers confirming the rating of specific shows, requests for information on how to start or star in a show, generic questions about the TV ratings system and other miscellaneous questions and comments as well as spam e-mails.

Of the 18 ratings complaints, twelve were directed at network and cable television and streaming services that officially participate in the TV Parental Guidelines while the remaining six complaints were about ratings for programming on streaming services that do not officially participate in the TV Parental Guidelines. Valid ratings complaints about programming on a network, cable or streaming service that participate in the TV Parental Guidelines are sent to those respective industry representatives as they are received. Industry representatives then review the ratings internally and respond to the viewer either directly or through the Monitoring Board with further information about the rating and/or to resolve any discrepancies. All ratings complaints are also shared with NAB, NCTA and MPA on a monthly basis along with a summary of all other correspondence.

Below are a few examples of complaints for specific programs that the Monitoring Board received this year, along with a brief overview of the actions taken to address the complaints.

In April, a viewer called the Monitoring Board to complain about a program that was distributed on a streaming service that she said scared her children. The Monitoring Board spoke with the viewer and explained that the streaming service that showed the program does not officially participate in the TV ratings system. The viewer expressed that she was so happy with the TV Parental Guidelines ratings system for networks and streaming services that do participate, and conveyed interest in efforts to ensure that additional content providers adhere to the TV Parental Guidelines.

In May, a viewer wrote to the Monitoring Board to complain about a television program's rating of TV-MA, asking whether an even more stringent rating of TV-X was an option. The Monitoring Board responded by sharing additional information about the TV-MA rating and the descriptors that can accompany the rating. The board also noted that TV-MA is the highest television rating possible and explained to the viewer that traditional movie ratings and the TV Parental Guidelines – while similar – are not the same. The Monitoring Board also worked with representatives at the applicable network that aired the program in question, which provided guidance for the response to the viewer by elaborating on why they selected the particular rating and descriptors.

In June, a viewer wrote to the Monitoring Board to complain about a television program that contained a song with language that the viewer felt was sexually suggestive. The Monitoring Board responded to notify the viewer that a representative from the applicable network had been contacted and that someone would be in touch. The network representative then responded to the viewer to say that the network had decided to re-rate the episode in question with a higher rating based on the viewer's feedback.

In September, a viewer called the Monitoring Board about a commercial that aired around 8:30 p.m. promoting a new show that featured cursing. The viewer noted that he was watching a family show on the channel and was taken aback by the language in the commercial at that hour. After getting more information from the viewer, the Monitoring Board passed the complaint along to network representatives. Network representatives looked into the commercial and found that the promo for a program targeting a more mature audience was scheduled to air only during TV-MA-rated content but inadvertently was shown during lower-rated programming. The commercial was removed from rotation and the network does not plan to air similar promos in the future. This was conveyed to the viewer by network representatives.

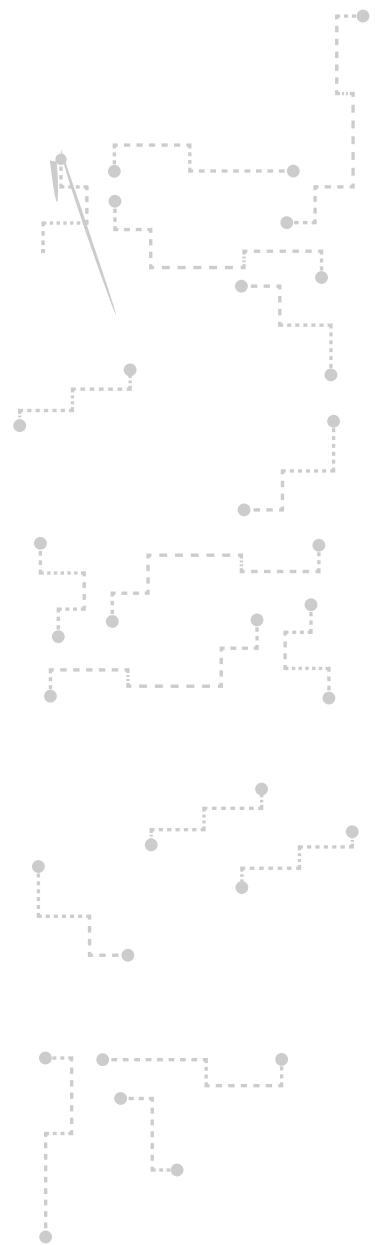
In 2019, the Monitoring Board implemented an enhanced policy for responding to correspondence. Starting in April, the Monitoring Board began responding to every piece of correspondence it receives, even if not directly related to TV ratings, to confirm to viewers that their feedback was received. In addition, ratings complaints are now shared with a broader team of representatives from the applicable network to ensure greater awareness of the ratings complaint and to facilitate a timely response. Finally, the Monitoring Board has improved its correspondence tracking system to allow for better complaint processing and status tracking of each complaint. When complaints about ratings are received, the Monitoring Board works closely with network representatives to determine why the show was given that rating and communicate that to the viewer – in some cases even modifying the rating.

CONCLUSION

In 2019, the Monitoring Board continued to improve upon and promote the valuable TV ratings system that helps parents make appropriate viewing choices for their children. The Monitoring Board worked hard to increase outreach and be more transparent. This year, the Monitoring Board focused on enhancements to its brand and website, greater collaboration with public interest Monitoring Board members, expanded participation at the National PTA Convention and Expo, testing its spot check review system and the publication of this first-ever annual report. The goal of these efforts is to ensure that parents are aware of the tools available to help them make informed decisions about what programs are suitable for their children. The Monitoring Board remains committed to continuing to evaluate itself and look for ways to continue to improve in the year ahead.



ADDENDUM



ABOUT THE GUIDELINES

Guidelines are modeled after the television movie ratings. They are designed to be easily recognizable and simple to use.

Guidelines apply to most television programs, including those directed specifically to young children. However, sports and news shows as well as most home shopping and religious programming do not carry the Guidelines.

The ratings icon and associated content descriptors appear at the beginning of a program in the

TV program. The icon on the TV screen in the program should remain visible throughout the program, and appear at the beginning of the second hour. Many channels also display the ratings icon after each commercial break.

- **TV ratings are applied on an episode-by-episode basis.** This can result in individual shows within a series carrying different ratings.

• **Movies and television series may be edited differently based on when and what channel they air.**

Individual shows may be edited differently based on the time of day and channel they air – premium cable (e.g., HBO), basic cable (e.g., USA Network) or broadcast (e.g., ABC) – which can result in one show having

different ratings to reflect the specific version being aired.

- **Thousands of hours of TV programming are rated every day.** Program producers and distributors

submit program reviews to the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board, which is responsible for ensuring that programs are appropriately rated.

ABOUT THE TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES MONITORING BOARD



The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board is comprised of experts from the television industry and public interest advocates who are responsible for ensuring there is uniformity and consistency in applying the Parental Guidelines as possible. The Board also reviews complaints about specific program ratings to help

For more information, please visit us at www.tvguidelines.org.



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