

## Testimony Given Before Joint Committee on Education in Support of Proposed Senate Bill 1956<sup>1</sup>

Directing the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to  
develop **standards for teaching media literacy K-12**

Submitted by Diane Levin, Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>  
November 1, 2011

I am a Professor of Education at Wheelock College in Boston, who has spent the past 25 years researching the impact of media and technology on children from birth-to eight, and teaching media literacy courses to teachers and parents around the world. I have written 8 books, including *Remote Control Childhood*, *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times* and *So Sexy So Soon*.

### Harmful Lessons

Media has transformed childhood. Forty-two percent of children from 0-to-8 have a television in their bedroom.<sup>3</sup> Many children now spend more time glued to screens than doing anything else but sleeping and time spent continues to increase rapidly.<sup>4</sup> Media is teaching children many social, emotional and intellectual lessons caring adults do not want them to learn and which children do not have the cognitive abilities to resist.<sup>5</sup>

- 1. Violence.** Starting at very young ages, violence, in both programs and products linked to them, is the common fare for boys. In its Policy Statement on Media Violence,<sup>6</sup> the American Academy of Pediatrics has concluded that children's exposure to media violence contributes to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, and fear of being harmed. The AAP strongly supports media literacy education for children to counteract the harm being caused by media violence.
- 2. Sexualization.** Sexualized behavior and appearance is the common fare in media

---

<sup>1</sup> Proposed Amendment to SECTION 1. Chapter 69 of the General Laws.

<sup>2</sup> 200 The Riverway, Boston, MA 02144, 617-879-2167, dlevin@wheelock.edu

<sup>3</sup> Common Sense Media. (Fall 2011). *Zero to Eight: Children's Media Use in America*. Available at: <http://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/research/zerotoeightfinal2011.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (January 20, 2010). *Daily Media Use Among Children and Teens Up Dramatically from Five Years Ago*. Available at: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia012010nr.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> Levin, D. E., (1998). *Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture*. (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.)

<sup>6</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. (Oct. 19, 2009). *Media Violence*. Available at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/124/5/1495.full>

programming for girls.<sup>7</sup> Almost from birth girls see images that tell them how they look and what they buy determines their value. It contributes to eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, and mean-spirited behavior.<sup>89</sup>

- 3. Commercialization.** Marketing to children through the media is a \$17 billion a year business. Children 2-to-11 see more than 25,000 advertisements per year<sup>10</sup>—many of which promote violence for boys and sexualization for girls. In addition to further escalating harmful lessons about gender roles and how people treat each other, these ads promote an unhealthy focus on buying instead of achievement as the source of success and happiness.

### **Media Literacy: Right from the Start**

By *not* providing media literacy education in our schools we have given media producers and marketers too much control over today's children's education.

Parents cannot fight the forces of media in their children's lives on their own. They need the help of teachers, who have been trained to promote the optimal development and learning of children and are thereby best suited to counteract the onslaught of today's media.

Children also need the help of schools. Too often they are left to their own devices to make sense of the harmful content they see. Too often as children try to figure out what they see, they are lured away from the other vital lessons schools are responsible to teach, such as literacy and math.

Requiring media literacy in Massachusetts' schools right from the start will make a real difference in children's lives and go a long way to improving their social, emotional and intellectual wellbeing.

Thank you for considering this most important bill. I strongly urge you to pass it.

---

<sup>7</sup> Levin, D.E. & Kilbourne, J. (2009). *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids*. (NY: Ballantine).

<sup>8</sup> American Psychological Association. (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*. Available at: <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> Levin, D.E. (2008). "Compassion Deficit Disorder? The Impact of Commercial and Media Culture on Children's Relationships." In M. Green (Ed.), *Risking Human Security: Attachment and Public Life*. London: Karnac.

<sup>10</sup> Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. "Marketing to Children Overview." Available at: <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/factsheets/overview.pdf>