

Jim Steyer, Founder and CEO, Common Sense Media
Testimony to Federal Communications Commission
En Banc Hearing, Stanford University, April 17, 2008

As a graduate of Stanford Law School and a member of the faculty here, I'm pleased to welcome you to Stanford.

These discussions about broadband network management have focused almost entirely about business issues that concern adults and media companies. While those issues are important, Common Sense Media is here to urge you to focus your deliberations on the most important group of consumers of the Internet and digital media: our kids.

I think it is especially appropriate for this Commission to focus on kids. Because whether it has been leading new efforts on childhood obesity, or requiring media companies to clean up their act when kids comprise a large part of their audience, this Commission's work on behalf of kids will be a hallmark of your legacy. Each of you deserves great credit for the bipartisan manner in which you have consistently tried to promote the best interests of children and families.

You've heard testimony about ensuring that consumers and businesses can effectively access the content they want. But we also need to talk about empowering families and educators as consumers, so they can protect children from content they *don't* want, and help them find top quality content quickly and easily.

I want to focus my remarks on ways that everyone involved can keep the interests of kids and families front and center. The most important of these is harnessing the educational power of the Internet, so that it continues to improve children's opportunities for learning.

First, some basic facts about kids and media:

- A recent Pew survey found that 93% of teens use the Internet today. Pre-teens are there in the tens of millions, and whether we like it or not, we have 3- and 4-year olds using the Internet today.
- Just as importantly, kids and teens are no longer just consumers – many are becoming content providers. The Pew survey found that 39% of online teens share their own artistic creations online – including artwork, photos and videos.
- In Common Sense Media's recent national survey, 85 percent of parents said that the Internet is the medium that poses the greatest risk to kids. Yet 74 percent said the Internet is the medium that offers kids the greatest opportunities for learning and growth.

The seemingly contradictory feelings actually make complete sense. The Internet and the growing world of digital media are full of *both* perils and possibilities. They can and do pose potential dangers for children, but they also create extraordinary, unparalleled opportunities for their education and development.

One thing is already clear. This isn't about how the Internet and this 24/7 digital reality *will* change children's lives – it already *has*, and is constantly changing them. We adults are just

visitors and immigrants to the world of the Internet – our children are the true natives. They are leading digital lives, with huge implications for our discussions here today and in the future.

- For example, you cannot define literacy in the 21st century without understanding the ever expanding presence of the internet and other digital media. Many of us lament that the average American high school kid cannot find Japan on a map. But those same kids can use the Internet and find the name of the third largest city in Japan in about 20 seconds, and probably learn more about that city than kids ever knew a generation ago.
- Whatever decisions the Commission makes about network management, your decisions must continue unleashing the incredible educational potential of the Internet.

We want to be very clear – Common Sense Media believes in sanity, not censorship. We believe that an informed consumer is the best consumer. We want all of the media companies with stakes in today’s discussion to do more to help parents, families and educators. By providing better tools and information, service providers and content providers can empower families to make smart choices for kids – and help them to make sure their kids find the good stuff, and avoid the bad stuff, in this changing media world.

Several of the commissioners have talked about how the Internet has fostered innovation. On behalf of children and families, we want the FCC to call on service providers and content providers to use that innovation to greatly expand the quality and quantity of tools and resources they provide to families, so that parents can choose media they feel is helpful and appropriate. This spirit of innovation can foster a ‘public Internet’ that truly serves the public interest by meeting the 21st century education needs of children and families.

I’d like to close by reiterating that an important aspect of this Commission’s legacy will be the bipartisan work that you have done – and can still do – on behalf of children and families. With that in mind, I have one final recommendation for you:

We would urge that this fall, you hold one more En Banc hearing, focusing exclusively on kids, and on the ways that the Internet and digital media can best serve the interests of kids in the 21st century.