

# Video game campaign begins

## Governor wants to keep some out of children's hands

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Gov. Rod Blagojevich today will launch a campaign to keep violent and sexually explicit video games out of the hands of Illinois children.

Blagojevich is to announce that he will seek passage of legislation to ban the distribution, sale, rental and availability of the games to anyone younger than 18. He is scheduled to appear at a 10:30 a.m. news conference at the Naperville Public Library.

The ban would apply to such video game titles as "Doom 3," "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" and "Gunslinger Girls," according to the governor's office.

At the news conference, Blagojevich plans to cite studies that link exposure to violent video games with heightened aggression in children. He will push for two bills that still are being drafted, said spokeswoman Rebecca Rausch.

One measure will define "violent" video games as those in which a player kills or injures another person. That would include portrayals of "death, dismemberment, amputation, decapitation, maiming, disfigurement, mutilation of body parts or rape," according to a news release.

The other bill will define "sexually explicit" video games as those that show nudity "exposed in a way that, in accordance with contemporary community standards, predominantly appeals to the prurient interest of the player," the news release said.

Violating the bans on sales or rentals to minors likely would be a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year in jail or a \$5,000 fine.

In addition, the proposed legislation will require retailers to place labels on violent and sexually explicit video games and to put up signs that explain the rating system for video games. Retailers who do not post the signs likely would face fines ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

The governor also will unveil a Web site that offers information about video games and lets parents report retailers who are selling violent and sexually explicit games to minors. The Web site is [www.safegamesillinois.org](http://www.safegamesillinois.org).

Rausch said Blagojevich has taken an interest in the issue of children playing inappropriate video games because it is "time to take a stand against it."

He also has been paying more attention to the video games that his older daughter, 8-year-old Amy, plays with friends, Rausch said. She said the youngster favors sports-related video games, including one that features snowboarding.

The governor believes "we need to find a way to help parents understand what their kids are buying," she said.

"Parents have a lot on their plate," Rausch added. "Children know a lot more about this stuff than we do."

Similar measures to regulate video games have won approval elsewhere, including in Indianapolis and St. Louis County, Mo., but federal courts later struck down those laws as unconstitutional.

Last year, the state of Washington enacted a law that barred retailers from selling to customers younger than 17 any video games portraying violence against law enforcement officials. A federal judge in July threw out the law, saying it violated free speech.

Rausch said the Blagojevich administration believes its proposals will not experience the same fate.

"We think our law will pass muster," she said.

A representative of the video game industry was not so sure, saying she has "strong concerns" about Blagojevich's proposals.

Gail Markels, senior vice president and general counsel for the Entertainment Software Association, said courts have determined that video games are protected speech in the same way as movies and

magazines.

"We think the principles of law are fairly well-settled," she said.

Also, the industry has "a rating system that we're very proud of" and works well, Markels said.

"What we've seen is an industry that's committed to regulating itself, that's made great improvements," she said.

Still, Markels said her organization would be willing to work with Blagojevich on the issue.

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