

From the Daily Southtown

Governor urges CTA to review game ads

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By Jan Dennis
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PEORIA — Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Monday urged the Chicago Transit Authority to get out of a contract that put advertisements on about 400 buses for a video game that includes police and prostitute killing.

During an appearance in Peoria to promote proposed legislation that would prohibit the sale or rental of violent and sexually explicit video games to children younger than 18, the governor said he is disappointed the CTA accepted ads for "the very kind of things that are inappropriate for kids to learn."

The CTA's contract to advertise "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" expires at the end of the month and has not been renewed, transit spokeswoman Noelle Gaffney said.

She said the CTA could be sued for refusing the ads because they do not violate legal standards, such as portraying obscenity or graphic violence. She said the agency has lost similar lawsuits in the past, including one for turning down abortion-related advertising.

"It's a first amendment issue. Advertisers have the same freedom of expression as the news media, for example," Gaffney said.

New York-based Take-Two Interactive Software, which owns game maker Rockstar Games, deferred questions to the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, which handles ratings for the industry. A spokesman from that group did not immediately offer comment.

Gaffney said the CTA received about \$90,000 under the contract.

Blagojevich said the newly released game is bloody and inappropriate for children, letting players kill police officers then kick their lifeless bodies.

"I just think it's the wrong kind of message, the wrong kind of thing for the CTA to advertise. I urge them to take a look at their contracts and do what they can to get out of those contracts," the governor said.

Similar ads also appeared on about 100 Pace buses that run in the outer Chicago suburbs, Gaffney said.

The governor will push legislation next spring that would make it a misdemeanor to sell or rent adult-oriented video games to children. He said parents need help sheltering children from the games.

He contends the games desensitize children to violence and sex, potentially leading to anti-social and inappropriate behavior. He also said the games are addictive, luring kids away from homework and contributing to childhood obesity and other health problems.

The governor was accompanied Monday during his appearance in Peoria by his wife and two young daughters.