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Illinois games restriction bill advances

Tim Surette, Special to CNET News.com

The Safe Games Illinois Act is a step closer to becoming law in the Prairie State.

House Bill 4023 was approved 6 to 2 in the state's Senate Housing and Community Affairs Committee on Tuesday, and now moves on to the state Senate. Since its proposal earlier this year, the bill has been readily approved through the legal process.

The bill would allow the state to slap its own ratings on games, ignoring those set by the self-regulatory Entertainment Software Ratings Board, or ESRB. The bill concentrates on keeping violent games out of youngsters' hands, and severely fines retailers who fail to do so.

According to state legislators, games that feature "dismemberment, decapitation, disfigurement, maiming, mutilation of body parts or rape" would be slapped with an "18" sticker similar to the parental advisory warning on compact discs. The sale of such games to minors would warrant legal action of a \$1,001 fine and a red mark on the seller's permanent record. The current ESRB ratings system isn't legally binding.

The full spectrum of the bill's effects has not been set in stone. Gov. Rod Blagojevich, a Democrat, has not yet clarified the scope of the rating system or the financial penalties the legislation would incur. The bill's sponsor, Democrat Deanna Demuzio, has said that she will not bring the proposal to a Senate vote until questions of the fines and labeling are made clearer.

Legislatures in at least six states are considering new proposals that would make it a crime to sell mature games to children.

A related bill failed to clear a California legislative committee Tuesday. It was the second time such an attempt has been defeated, according to an SFGate story.

Courts have overturned laws in the state of Washington; St. Louis County, Mo.; and Indianapolis that made it illegal to sell violent games to minors, in each case ruling that games are constitutionally protected speech, and age restrictions thus must be limited to the type of discretionary systems used for movies, books and other media.

Tim Surette reported for GameSpot. CNET News.com staff contributed to this report.