

(July 27, 2006) Press Conference, Family Choice Act

Statement of the Honorable Dan Lipinski (IL)

Introducing the Family Choice Act of 2006

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Today, I am proud to join with Rep. Osborne in introducing The Family Choice Act of 2006. This legislation is designed to help parents deal with the increasingly troublesome problem of protecting their children from indecent programming on television. There is absolutely no doubt that parents recognize this problem and want us to do something about it.

Parents are rightly concerned that their children are bombarded by obscene, indecent, and violent programming on television. Parents ask, what can you do to help us? We want to give parents the ability to subscribe to a television programming package that gives them the family-friendly channels they want to watch, without requiring them to purchase channels they would rather not expose their children to.

There is more than one way to do this. The Family Choice Act gives cable and satellite companies choices, so that - in turn - parents will have choices.

Under the legislation, cable, satellite and other multichannel providers will have three options.

One, they can apply to the channels on the expanded basic tier, the same indecency rules that cover broadcast channels. This would give programmers an incentive to stop producing indecent material for airing between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m.

Another option for providers is to implement an opt-out a la carte system. With this choice, families would have the ability to call their provider and say, "I don't want my MTV." After this request, the provider would have to do two things: block that channel from going into that household and lower the monthly bill accordingly, based on the cost of that channel to the provider.

The third choice is for providers to offer subscribers a "family tier" that includes all the channels included in the expanded basic tier, minus those that are not child-appropriate. In this bill we define child-appropriate channels as those that do not show TV-Mature or TV-14 shows between 6 am and 10 pm. This means that providers cannot simply offer families an unattractive bundle of programming as a "kids tier," leaving them without a meaningful family-friendly choice.

Though providers have talked about offering family friendly tiers, the options they give families often seem to be designed to fail. For example, under most family tiers being offered, a subscriber is not able to get popular sports channels or some popular news channels. If you want to watch a game on ESPN, you cannot subscribe to a family tier.

These three options are not new. They have been under discussion for awhile, and were included by FCC Chairman Kevin Martin as possible solutions to the indecency issue when he testified before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee last November. I applaud Chairman Martin for making this issue a priority.

And I am happy to see the Chairman has been very positive about a la carte and its impact on consumers.

But we believe it is time for Congress to act. It is clear that parents need help. They need new options and they need meaningful choices. This legislation will empower parents by giving them real choices for family-friendly programming. And it does so without imposing a single, one-size-fits-all mandate on providers.

Thank you.