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CLERK, U.S. DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

VIDEO SOFTWARE DEALERS
ASSOCIATION and ENTERTAINMENT
SOFTWARE ASSOCIATION,

Plaintiffs,

vs.

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, in his official
capacity as Governor of the State of California;
BILL LOCKYER, in his official capacity as
Attorney General of the State of California;
GEORGE KENNEDY, in his official capacity as
Santa Clara County District Attorney, RICHARD
DOYLE, in his official capacity as City Attorney
for the City of San Jose, and ANN MILLER
RAVEL, in her official capacity as County
Counsel for the County of Santa Clara,

Defendants.

05 4188

CASE NO.

COMPLAINT
FOR DECLARATORY
AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

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1 **COMPLAINT**

2 Plaintiffs Video Software Dealers Association (“VSDA”) and Entertainment Software
3 Association (“ESA”), by and through their attorneys, aver and allege as follows:
4

5 **NATURE OF THE ACTION**

6 1. Plaintiffs are associations whose members include companies that create, publish,
7 manufacture, distribute, import, sell, or rent video games to the public. Plaintiffs bring this action
8 pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 seeking declaratory and injunctive relief against enforcement of a new
9 California statute that significantly infringes upon constitutionally protected rights of free expression.

10 2. The challenged act, Chapter 638, Statutes of 2005 (hereinafter, the “Act”), was signed
11 into law on October 7, 2005, and is due to go into effect on January 1, 2006. The Act penalizes the
12 sale or rental of video games based solely on their expressive content and imposes strict labeling
13 requirements, in violation of the First Amendment. Specifically, the Act makes it illegal for anyone
14 in California to sell or rent to anyone under the age of 18 a “violent” video game. According to the
15 Act, a “violent video game” is a game “in which the range of options available to a player includes
16 killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being” Act,
17 § 1746(d)(1). A person who violates the Act is subject to substantial fines. *Id.* § 1746.3. The Act
18 also unconstitutionally compels speech by manufacturers, distributors, importers, and retailers by
19 requiring that each prohibited video game “that is imported into or distributed in California for retail
20 sale shall be labeled with a solid white ‘18’ outlined in black.” *Id.* § 1746.2. The label must measure
21 no less than 2 inches by 2 inches, and must be displayed on the front of the video game package. *Id.*

22 3. The Act violates the First Amendment and other provisions of the United States
23 Constitution by creating penalties for the sale or rental of video games based solely on a game’s
24 purportedly “violent” content. The First Amendment prohibits such content-based censorship. Not
25 only does the Act directly restrict the dissemination and receipt of a considerable amount of fully
26 protected expression, but, because of its numerous vague terms, the Act also creates a chilling effect
27 on a great deal of speech, as video game creators, publishers, manufacturers, distributors, importers,
28

1 and retailers will respond to the Act's uncertainty by self-censoring, depriving adults and children of
2 access to undeniably protected expression.

3 4. Similar efforts to regulate video games based on their expressive content have been
4 struck down by every court that has considered this issue, including the Seventh and Eighth Circuits,
5 and a District Court in the Ninth Circuit. *See American Amusement Mach. Ass'n v. Kendrick*, 244
6 F.3d 572, 579-80 (7th Cir. 2001) (holding that video games are protected expression, and striking
7 down ordinance that similarly sought to restrict minors' access to "violent" video games); *Interactive*
8 *Digital Software Ass'n v. St. Louis County*, 329 F.3d 954, 957 (8th Cir. 2003) (noting that "[t]he mere
9 fact" that video games "appear in a novel medium is of no legal consequence," and striking down
10 ordinance restricting "violent" video games); *Video Software Dealers Ass'n v. Maleng*, 325 F. Supp.
11 2d 1180, 1184-85 (W.D. Wash. 2004) (finding that video games are "expressive and qualify for the
12 protections of the First Amendment," and invalidating state statute restricting video games); *see also*
13 *James v. Meow Media, Inc.*, 300 F.3d 683, 696 (6th Cir. 2002) (confirming that the First Amendment
14 protects the communicative aspect of video games, and rejecting attempts to impose tort liability on
15 "violent" video games); *Sanders v. Acclaim Entm't, Inc.*, 188 F. Supp. 2d 1264, 1279 (D. Colo. 2002)
16 (same); *Wilson v. Midway Games, Inc.*, 198 F. Supp. 2d 167, 181 (D. Conn. 2002) (same).

17 5. Just as the Act restricts protected expression in violation of clear and binding
18 precedent, it imposes an additional significant First Amendment burden on those who manufacture,
19 distribute, import, sell, and/or rent video games. As explained in Paragraph 2 hereof, the Act requires
20 that any "violent" video game "imported into or distributed in California" be labeled with a 2 inches
21 by 2 inches label bearing the number "18." Act, § 1746.2. This requirement—which conflicts with
22 the voluntary labeling system already employed by the video game industry—significantly burdens
23 the expression rights of Plaintiffs' members. It also unconstitutionally compels speech by forcing
24 Plaintiffs' members to relay a government message with which they may disagree, and for which
25 there is no legitimate, much less substantial, underlying purpose.

26 6. Because some of Plaintiffs' members create, publish, manufacture, distribute, import,
27 sell or rent games that may fall within the statutory definition, they may be subject to liability under
28

1 the Act. The Act will violate the free speech rights of Plaintiffs' members not only through direct
2 restriction, but also as a result of the Act's inevitable chilling effect on video game expression.

3 7. Plaintiffs maintain that (a) the Act is void and of no force and effect because it is
4 unconstitutional under the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution of the United States
5 and thus actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983; and (b) Plaintiffs and their members, as well as many
6 citizens of California, will suffer immediate, serious, and irreparable injury if the Act takes effect.

7 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

8 8. This action arises under the Constitution of the United States, the First and Fourteenth
9 Amendments thereto, and the laws of the United States, 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1988, and 28 U.S.C.
10 §§ 2201 and 2202. This Court has jurisdiction over the subject matter of this action under 28 U.S.C.
11 §§ 1331 and 1343(a)(3). This action is brought against the defendants in their official capacity
12 pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

13 9. Venue is proper in the Northern District of California. Many of Plaintiff VSDA's and
14 Plaintiff ESA's members are located in and/or do business in this judicial district, and the claims thus
15 arise in this district. Upon information and belief, Defendants Doyle, Kennedy and Ravel also reside
16 in this judicial district, and are responsible for enforcing the Act within this judicial district.

17 **INTRADISTRICT ASSIGNMENT**

18 10. This action is properly assigned to the San Jose Division of this Court, as a substantial
19 part of the events or omissions which give rise to the claim occurred in the County of Santa Clara.
20 Civil L.R. 3-2 (c) & (e).

21 **PARTIES**

22 11. Plaintiff VSDA, established in 1981, is the not-for-profit international trade
23 association for the \$24 billion home entertainment industry. VSDA is incorporated in the State of
24 Delaware and its principal place of business is Los Angeles, California. VSDA represents more than
25 1,000 companies throughout the United States, Canada, and other nations. Its members operate
26 approximately 10,000 retail outlets in the U.S., including more than 1,250 in the State of California,
27 that sell and/or rent DVDs, VHS cassettes, and console video games. Membership comprises the full
28 spectrum of video retailers (from single-store operators to large chains), video distributors, the home

1 video divisions of major and independent motion picture studios, and other related businesses that
2 constitute and support the home video entertainment industry.

3 12. Plaintiff ESA is a nonprofit trade association organized under the laws of the State of
4 Delaware with its principal place of business in the District of Columbia. A fundamental purpose of
5 ESA is to serve and promote the business and public affairs interests of companies that publish
6 entertainment software used for video games, including such companies' right to publish and
7 distribute works of expression that are protected under the First Amendment to the United States
8 Constitution and similar provisions of the constitutions of various states. ESA members include a
9 number of entities that produce, distribute, and/or import video games to owners and operators of
10 sales and rental outlets within the City of San Jose, the County of Santa Clara, and throughout
11 California.

12 13. The interests that Plaintiffs VSDA and ESA seek to protect in this action are germane
13 to the purposes of each organization, and neither the claims nor the forms of relief sought in this
14 action require participation by individual members of Plaintiffs. One or more members of each
15 association have standing to bring this action in their own right.

16 14. Plaintiffs are threatened with immediate, serious, and irreparable injury as a result of
17 the enactment and imminent enforcement of the Act. Once the Act is in force, Plaintiffs and their
18 members will be subject to liability for disseminating works fully protected under the First
19 Amendment. The Act will have an immediate and vast chilling effect upon constitutionally protected
20 speech because those who sell, rent, or permit to be sold or rented video games (and their respective
21 distributors and importers) will, to avoid liability under the Act, refrain from offering for rental or
22 sale a wide array of games, either to minors or to all customers. This will in turn chill video game
23 creators, publishers, manufacturers, distributors, and importers from creating, publishing,
24 manufacturing, distributing, and importing works that may run afoul of the Act's vague definition of
25 prohibited content. Plaintiffs will also be unlawfully compelled by the Act to disseminate a message
26 on behalf of the State of California that is not tied to a legitimate regulatory purpose.

27 15. The Act will also cause irreparable harm to willing listeners—including both those
28 under age 18 and adults—who will be deprived of the ability to hear speech from Plaintiffs'

1 members. In this facial challenge to the Act, Plaintiffs have standing to assert not only their own
2 rights and harm, but also that of the potential recipients of speech from Plaintiffs' members.

3 16. Defendant Arnold Schwarzenegger is the Governor of the State of California. As
4 Governor, he is vested with "the supreme executive power" of the State and "shall see that the law is
5 faithfully executed." Cal. Const. art. 5, § 1. This injunctive action is brought against Governor
6 Schwarzenegger in his official capacity.

7 17. Defendant Bill Lockyer is the Attorney General of the State of California. He is the
8 "chief law officer" of the State and has the duty to "see that the laws of the State are uniformly and
9 adequately enforced." Cal. Const. art. 5, § 13. Additionally, Attorney General Lockyer has "direct
10 supervision over every district attorney" in the State. *Id.* If, at any point a district attorney of the
11 State fails to enforce adequately "any law of the State," the Attorney General must "prosecute any
12 violations of the law." *Id.* Finally, the Attorney General "shall assist any district attorney in the
13 discharge" of duties when "required by the public interest or directed by the Governor. . . ." *Id.* This
14 injunctive action is brought against Attorney General Lockyer in his official capacity.

15 18. Defendant George Kennedy is the District Attorney responsible for enforcing the law
16 within the County of Santa Clara. Pursuant to the California Government Code, the District Attorney
17 must prosecute "all actions for the recovery" of fines and penalties. Cal. Gov't Code § 26521. The
18 Act provides that violations thereof may be prosecuted by any District Attorney. § 1746.4. This
19 injunctive action is brought against District Attorney Kennedy in his official capacity.

20 19. Defendant Richard Doyle is the City Attorney responsible for enforcing the law within
21 the City of San Jose. The California Government Code requires the City Attorney to perform legal
22 services as required by the Legislature. Cal. Gov't Code § 41803. The Act provides that violations
23 thereof may be prosecuted by any City Attorney. § 1746.4. This injunctive action is brought against
24 City Attorney Doyle in his official capacity.

25 20. Defendant Ann Miller Ravel is the County Counsel responsible for enforcing the law
26 within the County of Santa Clara. In that capacity, she must "discharge all the duties vested in the
27 district attorney." Cal. Gov't Code § 26529. This injunctive action is brought against County
28 Counsel Ravel in her official capacity.

1 **BACKGROUND**

2 **Video Games and the First Amendment**

3 21. The Act seeks to regulate the content of a certain medium of expression (defined as
4 “video games” under the Act) and limit access to certain video games based solely on the content of
5 the expression depicted or contained therein.

6 22. Video games are a form of artistic expression much like other forms of protected
7 expression, such as movies, books, and music. Video games contain extensive storylines and
8 character development, comparable to that of books and movies. The storylines and plot, and
9 associated dialogue among characters, continue throughout the game play and are an integral part of
10 the game itself. Like the best of literature, the storylines often involve familiar themes such as good
11 versus evil, triumph over adversity, struggle against corrupt governments and rulers, and/or quest for
12 adventure. Expression in other media, such as movies and books, draws thematic ideas directly from
13 video games. Video games similarly draw and evolve themes from other media.

14 23. Video games also feature the artwork of some of the best modern graphic artists. The
15 typical video game contains many different animated or computer-generated illustrations. Video
16 games also contain music, much of it original and performed by top musicians and orchestras. Like
17 the music that plays during movies, the music in video games enhances and complements the
18 expression conveyed by the images and dialogue, often in dramatic fashion.

19 24. The First Amendment provides that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the
20 freedom of speech, or of the press,” U.S. Const. amend. I, and the prohibitions of the First
21 Amendment apply to the State of California, U.S. Const. amend. XIV.

22 25. The First Amendment shields verbal expression, written expression, visual expression,
23 entertainment, art, and music. The protections of the First Amendment apply just as much to video
24 games as they do to books, newspapers, films, theater, and music.

25 26. The First Amendment also protects expressions and depictions of violence devoid of
26 obscene sexual content. Thus, video games depicting violence—like movies or illustrations that
27 depict violence—are fully protected by the First Amendment.

The Act's Restrictions on Protected Speech

27. The Act was passed by the California Legislature on September 8, 2005, and was signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger on October 7, 2005. A true, complete, and accurate copy of the Act is attached hereto as Exhibit 1, and is incorporated herein as if fully set forth. The Act is due to go into effect on January 1, 2006.

28. The Act seeks to suppress expression in the video game medium because of the supposed effect of that expression on minors under the age of 18. The Act asserts that the restrictions on speech are justified by a compelling state interest in “preventing violent, aggressive, and antisocial behavior, and in preventing psychological or neurological harm to minors who play violent video games.” Act § 1(c).

29. The Act seeks to suppress expression in games deemed “violent video games,” defined by the Act as follows:

“Violent video game” means a video game in which the range of options available to a player includes killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting an image of a human being, if those acts are depicted in the game in a manner that does either of the following:

(A) Comes within all of the following descriptions:

(i) A reasonable person, considering the game as a whole, would find [it] appeals to a deviant or morbid interest of minors.

(ii) It is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the community as to what is suitable for minors.

(iii) It causes the game, as a whole, to lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors[; or]

(B) Enables the player to virtually inflict serious injury upon images of human beings or characters with substantially human characteristics in a manner which is especially heinous, cruel, or depraved in that it involves torture or serious physical abuse to the victim.

Act § 1746(d)(1).

30. The Act defines the terms contained in § 1746(d)(1)(B) as follows:

(A) “Cruel” means that the player intends to virtually inflict a high degree of pain by torture or serious physical abuse of the victim in addition to killing the victim.

(B) “Depraved” means that the player relishes the virtual killing or shows indifference to the suffering of the victim, as evidenced by torture or serious physical abuse of the victim.

1 (C) "Heinous" means shockingly atrocious. For the killing depicted
2 in a video game to be heinous, it must involve additional acts of torture
or serious physical abuse of the victim as set apart from other killings.

3 (D) "Serious physical abuse" means a significant or considerable
4 amount of injury or damage to the victim's body which involves a
5 substantial risk of death, unconsciousness, extreme physical pain,
6 substantial disfigurement, or substantial impairment of the function of a
7 bodily member, organ, or mental faculty. Serious physical abuse,
unlike torture, does not require that the victim be conscious of the
8 abuse at the time it is inflicted. However, the player must specifically
9 intend the abuse apart from the killing.

10 (E) "Torture" includes mental as well as physical abuse of the
11 victim. In either case, the virtual victim must be conscious of the abuse
at the time it is inflicted; and the player must specifically intend to
12 virtually inflict severe mental or physical pain or suffering upon the
13 victim, apart from killing the victim.

14 (3) Pertinent factors in determining whether a killing depicted in a
video game is especially heinous, cruel, or depraved include infliction
of gratuitous violence upon the victim beyond that necessary to commit
the killing, needless mutilation of the victim's body, and helplessness
of the victim.

15 Act, §§ 1746(d)(2), (3).

16
17 31. Section 1746.1(a) of the Act would impose restrictions on freedom of expression by
18 making it unlawful for any "person" to "sell or rent a video game that has been labeled as a violent
19 video game to a minor." Act, § 1746.1(a). A minor is defined as a person under 18 years of age. *Id.*
20 § 1746(a). A "person" under the Act means "any natural person, partnership, firm, association,
21 corporation, limited liability company, or other legal entity." *Id.* § 1746(b).

22 32. The Act further provides that "[e]ach violent video game that is imported into or
23 distributed in California for retail sale shall be labeled with a solid white '18' outlined in black. The
24 '18' shall have dimensions of no less than 2 inches by 2 inches" and "shall be displayed on the front
25 face of the video game package." Act, § 1746.2.

26 33. A person who violates any provision of the Act is subject to a \$1,000 fine. Act,
27 § 1746.3.

1 34. A person is not liable under the sale/rental prohibition if the person selling or renting a
2 prohibited game presents “[p]roof that a defendant, or his or her employee or agent, demanded, was
3 shown, and reasonably relied upon evidence that a purchaser or renter of a violent video game was
4 not a minor or that the manufacturer failed to label a violent video game as required” by the Act.
5 Act, § 1746.1(b). The Act states that the restriction on the sale or rental of a “violent” video game to
6 a minor does not apply if the person selling or renting the game is the “minor’s parent, grandparent,
7 aunt, uncle, or legal guardian.” *Id.*, § 1746.1(c). The Act does not, however, establish an exemption
8 for minors who purchase or rent “violent” video games with parental permission.

9 35. The Act states that the sale/rental restrictions, and the labeling requirements, do not
10 apply to any person who: (a) “is employed solely in the capacity of a salesclerk or other, similar
11 position”; (b) “does not have an ownership interest in the business in which the violation occurred”;
12 and (c) “is not employed as a manager in that business.” Act. § 1746.3.

13 36. The Act permits a parent, legal guardian, or other adult acting on a minor’s behalf to
14 report a suspected violation of the Act to a city attorney, county counsel, or district attorney, and any
15 of those officials may prosecute a violation of the Act. Act, § 1746.4.

16 **The Act Violates the First Amendment**

17 37. By restricting the sale or rental of video games deemed “violent” under the statute, the
18 Act imposes penalties based on the content of the games’ expression. The Act therefore is subject to
19 the most exacting scrutiny under the First Amendment.

20 38. No compelling state interest exists that justifies the broad suppression of speech
21 imposed by the Act. The Act is based on purported legislative findings that exposing minors to
22 “violent” video games makes “minors more likely to experience feelings of aggression,” promotes
23 “violent, antisocial or aggressive behavior,” and causes “a reduction of activity in the frontal lobes of
24 the brain.” Act § 1(a). But those claims, which ignore conflicting evidence, are not supported by
25 credible factual support. The purported legislative “findings” are not based on reasonable inferences
26 drawn from substantial evidence.

27 39. In addition, the Act suppresses purportedly “violent” expression without any
28 legislative finding or underlying evidence that exposure to such expression is directed to and likely to

1 cause imminent violent action by the game player. Instead, the Legislature merely concluded that
2 players of violent video games are “more likely” to experience “feelings” of aggression. Act, § 1(a).

3 40. The Act is not the least restrictive means of achieving any of the Legislature’s asserted
4 goals, and the Legislature refused to consider less speech-restrictive means of regulating minors’
5 access to “violent” video games, including those that were proposed by Plaintiffs and their members
6 (such as educational efforts, parental controls, and retailer enforcement initiatives).

7 41. The Act presents Plaintiffs’ members with the possibility of arbitrary and
8 discriminatory enforcement because the Act fails to set forth minimal standards for enforcement. The
9 Act does not set forth adequately specific standards for determining which video games have
10 sufficient “violent” content to fall within the Act’s prohibitions.

11 42. The Act is rife with unconstitutionally vague terms, which fail to give reasonable
12 notice of what conduct is prohibited. The vague terms include, but are not limited to: “killing,
13 maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting *an image of a human being*”; “deviant or morbid
14 interest of minors”; “patently offensive to prevailing standards in the community as to what is
15 suitable for minors”; “virtually inflict serious injury upon images of human beings or characters with
16 substantially human characteristics”; “virtually inflict a high degree of pain”; “the player relishes the
17 virtual killing”; “shows indifference to the suffering of the victim”; “the virtual victim must be
18 conscious of the abuse”; “shockingly atrocious”; “virtually inflict severe mental or physical pain or
19 suffering”; and “gratuitous violence.” These terms have no clear meaning, especially in the context
20 of video games. For example, how would a person assess whether a particular video game depicted
21 violence against a character with “substantially human characteristics”? Would a character with
22 magical powers qualify? What about a zombie? A centaur? Likewise, what is meant by a “deviant
23 or morbid interest of minors”? How can a person “virtually inflict” physical or mental pain? How
24 can a “virtual victim” be “conscious” of anything? At what point does a computerized image
25 experience a “high degree of pain”? What constitutes a player “relish[ing] [a] virtual killing?”
26 Persons of ordinary intelligence are forced to guess at the meaning and scope of the Act.

27 43. Even setting aside the inherent ambiguity in the Act’s terms, the Act requires video
28 game publishers, manufacturers, distributors, and importers to assess whether a video game is violent

1 based on subjective assessments of a game player's intent. For example, various provisions of the
2 Act require an assessment based on whether the player "intend[s] to inflict a high degree of pain" or
3 "relish[es] the virtual killings." Act, §§ 1746(d)(2)(A),(B). Given that the course of play differs for
4 each game player, video game publishers, manufacturers, distributors, and importers will be unable to
5 assess whether a particular game falls within the Act's prohibitions.

6 44. The lack of adequate guidelines to determine "violent" conduct will have a chilling
7 effect on the expression of Plaintiffs' members. Under the Act, video game creators, publishers,
8 manufacturers, distributors, and importers must determine which games may be subject to the
9 statute's penalties. By their nature, games offer the player a wide range of possible game play of
10 significant duration. Even if only a small portion of a game contained content that theoretically met
11 the Act's definitions, the entire game would be suppressed. Moreover, to ensure that the games do
12 not violate the Act, those who import and/or distribute video games in California would be expected
13 to review the entire possible course of play in a particular game. The significant burdens imposed by
14 the law will ultimately lead to a chilling of speech of video game creators, publishers, manufacturers,
15 distributors, importers, retailers and consumers.

16 45. In addition, the Act forces anyone who imports or distributes video games in
17 California to determine which video games may be considered "violent," and thus must be labeled
18 with the large "18" sticker, to avoid penalties under the labeling provisions. As a result, different
19 manufacturers, distributors, and importers will almost certainly reach different, and conflicting,
20 determinations as to what types of game play qualify for the "18" label under the Act.

21 46. The Act's labeling requirement imposes an additional content-based burden on
22 Plaintiffs' members that is unsupported by a compelling state interest. The video game industry has
23 already invested significant amounts of money and resources into developing labels, signs, and
24 materials that educate parents and consumers about the industry's voluntary rating system. That
25 system — which the FTC has called the "most comprehensive" of industry-wide media rating
26 systems — is implemented by the Entertainment Software Rating Board ("ESRB"), a self-regulatory
27 body that assigns independent ratings and descriptions for video game content. The Act's size,
28 appearance, and placement requirements conflict with the ESRB rating system, and complying with

1 the Act's requirements in this regard would be extremely costly, burdensome, and impractical for
2 those who are required to label games under the Act. These requirements also unconstitutionally
3 compel manufacturers, distributors, and importers — and the retailers that display the games — to
4 disseminate a State message for which there is no underlying substantial regulatory interest.

5 47. Some of the content displayed by the video games created, published, manufactured,
6 distributed, imported, rented, sold, and/or otherwise made available to the public by Plaintiffs or their
7 members, while fully protected by the United States Constitution, may be deemed by law
8 enforcement officials in California, including the Defendants, to meet the Act's definitions for
9 "violent video games," thus subjecting Plaintiffs or their members to the threat of prosecution, as well
10 as creating a chilling effect on their rights to freedom of expression.

11 48. The Act would infringe the First Amendment rights of (i) businesses physically
12 present in California, including Plaintiffs' members, who face the threat of prosecution if they do not
13 comply with restrictions on their right to distribute constitutionally protected expression, (ii) potential
14 customers of those businesses—including both those under 18 as well as adults—who, because of
15 these restrictions, will be deprived of the opportunity to receive fully protected speech, and (iii)
16 businesses located outside California, including members of Plaintiffs, whose ability to distribute
17 and/or import their creative works within California will be burdened based on the content of those
18 works of expression.

19 49. The Act threatens Plaintiffs, their members, and other businesses that create, publish,
20 manufacture, distribute, import, sell, or rent video games, as well as adults and those under 18 who
21 wish to receive the speech in those games, with serious, immediate, and irreparable injury for which
22 there is no adequate remedy at law.

23 50. In this facial constitutional challenge to the Act, Plaintiffs have standing to assert the
24 rights of, and harm to, the potential customers of Plaintiffs and their members.

25 51. The Act would cause Plaintiffs and their members to be subjected to the deprivation of
26 rights, privileges, and immunities secured to them by the Constitution and laws of the United States.
27 The Act thus constitutes a deprivation of rights actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
28

1 description set forth in Paragraphs 29 and 30 hereof, prior to publishing, manufacturing, distributing,
2 importing, or otherwise holding that game out to the public. The Act imposes upon every such
3 person the risk of substantial penalties. This burden and risk are aggravated by the vagueness of the
4 statutory description of the regulated content. The Act thus would establish an unconstitutional
5 scheme of censorship under which even works of expression that do not meet the statutory
6 description in the Act would be suppressed because of the burden placed upon video game
7 publishers, manufacturers, distributors, importers, and retailers of determining the scope of the Act's
8 coverage and because of the risk of erroneous determinations. Persons disseminating video games
9 (and their respective manufacturers, distributors, and importers) would be induced to refuse to
10 include certain works in their inventories or on their premises, for fear of running afoul of the Act's
11 ambiguous prohibitions. Imposition of this burden and risk serves no compelling interest and is not
12 narrowly tailored to serve any such interest.

13 57. Furthermore, the Act would compel video game manufacturers, distributors, and
14 importers to label every game that might be "violent" under the Act's ambiguous definition. The
15 labeling requirement essentially compels video game manufacturers, distributors, and importers —
16 and the retailers that display the games — to disseminate the government's message that minors
17 should be denied access to certain video games, even though the games are fully protected as to both
18 minors and adults. Forcing individuals to disseminate a message on behalf of the State of California
19 violates the First Amendment every bit as much as restricting the dissemination of individuals' own
20 messages.

21 58. For each of the reasons set forth above, and others, the Act is unconstitutional under
22 the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, as applied to the State of California by the
23 Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Act would
24 cause Plaintiffs and their members to be subjected to the deprivation of rights, privileges, and
25 immunities secured to them by the Constitution and laws of the United States. The Act thus
26 constitutes a deprivation of rights actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

COUNT II

(First and Fourteenth Amendments—Vagueness)

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2
3 59. Plaintiffs repeat and reallege the allegations of paragraphs 1 through 58 as if fully set
4 forth herein.

5 60. The Act is unconstitutionally vague in that many of the terms and phrases employed
6 therein have no clear meaning in the context of animated video games, including but not limited to,
7 the terms and phrases “killing, maiming, dismembering, or sexually assaulting *an image of a human*
8 *being*”; “deviant or morbid interest of minors”; “patently offensive to prevailing standards in the
9 community as to what is suitable for minors”; “virtually inflict serious injury upon images of human
10 beings or characters with substantially human characteristics”; “virtually inflict a high degree of
11 pain”; “the player relishes the virtual killing”; “shows indifference to the suffering of the victim”;
12 “the virtual victim must be conscious of the abuse”; “shockingly atrocious”; “virtually inflict severe
13 mental or physical pain or suffering”; and “gratuitous violence.” Persons of ordinary intelligence are
14 forced to guess at their meaning and at the scope of the Act.

15 61. The unconstitutional vagueness of the Act will have a chilling effect on video game
16 creators, publishers, manufacturers, distributors, importers and retailers and on those who seek to
17 hear and view the prohibited video games. In addition, the Act will impose substantial burdens upon
18 persons who sell, rent, or permit to be sold or rented video games, preventing them from exercising
19 their constitutionally protected freedom of expression. The Act’s vagueness is also likely to lead to
20 enforcement by law enforcement officials on an unfair, subjective, and *ad hoc* basis. Because many
21 of the Act’s terms have no clear meaning, the Act will restrict a far broader range of video games
22 than even the State claims it is seeking to regulate, because manufacturers, distributors, and importers
23 likely will respond to the uncertainty and fear of penalties by labeling a much broader category of
24 video games. As a result, Plaintiffs’ members’ protected expression will not reach willing recipients.

25 62. For each of the reasons set forth above, and others, the Act is unconstitutional under
26 the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, as well as
27 the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, as applied to the State of California by the
28 Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Act would cause Plaintiffs and their

1 members to be subjected to the deprivation of rights, privileges, and immunities secured to them by
2 the Constitution and laws of the United States. The Act thus constitutes a deprivation of rights
3 actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

4 **COUNT III**

5 **(Fourteenth Amendment—Equal Protection)**

6 63. Plaintiffs repeat and reallege the allegations of paragraphs 1 through 62 as if fully set
7 forth herein.

8 64. The Act regulates and restricts under the threat of substantial penalties certain works
9 of expression presented through the medium of video games. These same regulations, restrictions,
10 and penalties do not apply to other works of expression containing the same or similar content, but
11 communicated in other media, including, by way of example only, cable television, broadcast
12 television, movies, books, magazines, and the like. Indeed, many of these other media—which
13 compete with video games for consumers—contain expression that is based on video games that
14 could fall within the prohibitions of the Act. Likewise, video games that could fall within the Act's
15 prohibitions may themselves be based on similar speech in other, unregulated media.

16 65. The Act arbitrarily and irrationally would establish a legislative scheme of
17 classifications that burden fundamental rights and that are not closely related to any compelling state
18 interest.

19 66. For the foregoing reasons, and others, the Act is unconstitutional under the Equal
20 Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Act would
21 cause Plaintiffs and their members to be subjected to the deprivation of rights, privileges, and
22 immunities secured to them by the Constitution and laws of the United States. The Act thus
23 constitutes a deprivation of rights actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

24 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

25 WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs demand that this Court enter a judgment in Plaintiffs' favor and
26 against Defendants as follows:
27
28

- 1 (a) That this Court issue a declaratory judgment that the Act is void and of
2 no force and effect;
- 3 (b) That this Court issue a preliminary injunction and a permanent
4 injunction against Defendants enjoining them from enforcing, or
5 directing the enforcement of, the Act in any respect;
- 6 (c) That Plaintiffs be awarded their attorneys' fees under 42 U.S.C. § 1988;
- 7 (d) That Plaintiffs be awarded their costs herein; and
- 8 (e) That this Court order such other general and equitable relief as it deems
9 fit and proper.
- 10 (d) That Plaintiffs be awarded their costs herein; and
- 11 (e) That this Court order such other general and equitable relief as it deems
12 fit and proper.

13 Respectfully submitted.

14 DATED: October 17, 2005.

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