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**ABSTRACT**

The Committee on Children's Television (CCT) supports Action for Children's Television (ACT) in its demands for no commercials on children's television and an improvement in programing for children. A survey of children's television in the San Francisco Bay Area determined that from 1961 to 1971, children's programing had declined in quality and also in quantity. Locally produced programs had fallen from 56% to 9%. Instead, the stations ran syndicated cartoons and reruns of poor quality network shows. When license renewal applications of local stations were examined, it was learned that the stations did next to nothing to ascertain children's needs and interests. In addition, most children's television shows contained no minority characters, and the ones that were shown were largely stereotypes. CCT urges the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to uphold its mandate and require that stations actively ascertain children's needs and interests by consulting experts on children, child advocate groups, parents, and children themselves. (JK)

# CHILDREN'S TELEVISION, INC.

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## COMMITTEE ON

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### TOWARDS BETTER CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

The position of the Committee on Children's Television (CCT) of San Francisco, California as presented by Paul J. Mundie to the Federal Communications Commission during the Hearings held in Washington, D.C. on January 8, 9 and 10, 1973 in connection with Children's Television Proceeding, Docket No. 19142.

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There was a child went forth every day,  
and the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,  
and that object became part of him for the day or a certain  
part of the day  
or for many years or stretching cycles of years.

Walt Whitman

My name is Paul J. Mundie. I am General Counsel and Secretary of the Committee on Children's Television. The Committee on Children's Television is a non-profit California corporation organized for the purpose of improving children's television in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Committee on Children's Television, also known as CCT, has in the past worked closely with Action for Children's Television in an attempt to improve the dismal programming currently available to American children.

While the Commission has undoubtedly obtained an overview of the abysmal state of children's programming across the nation, I feel it would be worthwhile to describe in some detail CCT's experience with television programming for children in the San Francisco Bay Area.

CCT was formed by a group of concerned citizens who became increasingly aware that television was having a significant impact on their children and that the impact was far from beneficial.

CCT developed an Advisory Board composed of a diverse group of educators, psychologists, psychiatrists, parents and citizens who were willing to focus their efforts on improving television for Bay Area children. CCT quickly realized that if it were to have any possibility of improving children's television it would first have to analyze carefully the full range of programming being broadcast in

the Bay Area. Such a study was undertaken by CCT and the results were published under the title "Wasteland Revisited" which has been filed with the Commission as an informal comment in all license renewal cases of Bay Area stations.

Wasteland Revisited chronicled the demise of programming for children in the Bay Area. It found that in the decade from 1961 to 1971 service to children had declined at an astounding rate. Local production had all but disappeared, and the airwaves were flooded with inexpensive syndicated cartoons and reruns of poor quality network shows.

The study noted for example that the percentage of locally produced programming for children had fallen from a high of 56% in 1961 to only 9% in 1971. Eighty percent of the programs directed to children on week days were old network and syndicated series being rerun for the second or third time. The study found the stations were making no attempts to provide programming suited to their local audience.

In addition to the virtual abandonment of local programming for children, Bay Area stations reduced the quantity of overall programming for children. In 1961 the four Bay Area VHF stations broadcast 70 hours per week of children's programming; in 1971, those same four stations broadcast only 47 hours of children's programming. The Commission needs no reminder that during this decade there was increased public awareness and concern about children's

television. It is inconceivable to CCT how supposedly responsible broadcasters could allow their children's programming to deteriorate in this fashion.

Wasteland Revisited went on to analyze in detail the children's programming offered by each of the Bay Area stations as well as the history of CCT's consultation with each of the Bay Area stations.

A later Report, Television and Children's Needs, analyzed the license renewal applications of each of the stations in the Bay Area to determine what steps, if any, Bay Area stations were taking to improve children's television. This analysis showed that Bay Area stations had little or no interest in significantly improving children's television in the Bay Area. A review of the ascertainment sections of the renewal applications would suggest the children as a segment of the viewing audience did not exist. Despite the fact that children constitute more than 25% of the Bay Area population, and are notoriously frequent viewers of television, no effort had been made by any of the Bay Area stations to ascertain the needs and interests of children as a group.

Upon the conclusion of these studies, CCT's preliminary conclusion that children's television in the Bay Area was in a dismal state was fully documented. But perhaps more disturbing than the actual state of children's television was CCT's conviction that there was little promise for improvement. Stations in the Bay Area

had no idea of what effect the programming they were showing was having on children. There was no planning by the stations to meet any particular needs and interests of children. Indeed, the general reaction of Bay Area stations to children's programming was that it provided advertising revenue and that the kids seemed "entertained" by it.

When asked what type of an ascertainment program broadcasters were conducting with respect to the needs and interests of the children, broadcasters uniformly replied that they felt that they had no obligation to discern needs and interests of children; although some glibly suggested that in talking to some teachers they were sure they had an overall view of the needs and interests of the community. Broadcasters ignored any requirement of the Commission to ascertain needs and interests of children. They took the most narrow and limiting view of the Commission's Primer on Ascertainment possible.

The result of this was that broadcasters had no conception of the effect or impact of their programming on children. Having little concern or interest, broadcasters abandoned, or severely curtailed, their origination of local programming for children. They accepted, without thought or criticism, whatever was generated by the network or the syndicate to which they were affiliated.

A more recent report, prepared by CCT in cooperation with the Bay Area Association of Black Psychologists, the Chinese Media Committee, and the League of United Latin

American Citizens, indicated that gap between the needs and interests of children in the Bay Area and the programming presented by Bay Area broadcasters to meet those needs and interests is as wide as ever.

Twenty-seven of the twenty-eight children's programs presented on Saturday, December 16, 1972 by the major network stations were monitored. The results of this monitoring indicated that seventeen of twenty-seven programs contained no minority representation whatsoever despite the fact that San Francisco has substantial populations of blacks, Chinese, Spanish surnamed, and other minority groups. In fact, over two-thirds of the children enrolled in the San Francisco Public Schools are minority group members. The study indicated that the television programs in which minority group members did appear did little to erase the typical ethnic stereotypes. Spanish surnamed individuals were virtually ignored -- only one appeared in all of the programs monitored and that was a derogatory reference; Asian Americans appeared in only one program. Nothing indicated the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of the San Francisco Bay Area. This study once again indicates the failure of Bay Area stations to serve the needs and interests of Bay Area children.

I would like at this time to ask that these three studies be made part of the record of this Inquiry.

In addition to monitoring Bay Area children's television and analyzing its impact, CCT has attempted to establish an ongoing working relationship with Bay Area

broadcasters. The history of CCT's consultation with stations in the Bay Area has indicated a superficial interest on the part of broadcasters to meet with "citizens groups". Each visit, letter or telephone conversation is carefully logged and noted, ready to demonstrate to the Commission the broadcasters' involvement with the community. But, beyond their superficial cordiality, one quickly finds that broadcasters are not interested in effective community involvement. Broadcasters, who have themselves developed no conception as to what they are doing with their children's programming, are unable to effectively utilize any of the community resources available to them. Broadcasters who have not even attempted to determine what the needs and the interests of children are, can scarcely be counted upon to appropriately utilize community resources to serve the needs and interests of children.

The decline in quantity and quality of children's programming which the San Francisco Bay Area suffered from the period 1961 to 1971 has been mitigated to some extent. The formation of the Committee on Children's Television and the increased awareness by many minority groups of the impact of television, caused many stations to reassess their public be damned attitude. While this minimal success is indeed heartening, it is by no means indicative of a permanent solution to the problems of children's television. While the work of citizens groups such as Action for Children's Television and CCT has been widely praised,



it must be noted that these are basically volunteer organizations with severe limitations of budget and personnel. They have neither the time nor the resources to resolve the problems of children's television.

Under the Communications Act of 1934 the Federal Communications Commission is entrusted with seeing that the nation's airwaves are used in the public interest. The Commission is required to determine prior to licensing a broadcaster, that the issuance of the license is in the public interest. In carrying out that obligation, on January 20, 1971 the Commission adopted a Notice of Inquiry and a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking with the respect to a submission received from Action for Children's Television.

By holding this Inquiry the Commission has tacitly acknowledged the current deplorable state of children's television. This rulemaking proceeding presents an unprecedented opportunity for the Commission to reenkindle in television broadcasters the obligation to act in the public interest.

Comments filed by broadcasters would suggest to the Commission that it is prevented by the First Amendment from taking any effective action to improve children's television. This argument is no more than a shibboleth under which broadcasters would have this Commission abandon its legislative mandate and its obligation to the public. Decisions of the Supreme Court have made clear time after time that the purview of the First Amendment is not nearly so broad with respect to commercial interests, nor is the health and safety of children outside the scope of constitutionally permissible restrictions.

The power and mandate of the Commission cannot be seriously questioned. There remains only for the Commission to determine an appropriate mechanism for carrying out its mandate to improve children's television. Action for Children's Television has presented a proposal to the Commission urging that there be no sponsorship of children's programming and that no performer be permitted to use or mention brand name products or services during children's programming. ACT has further suggested that each station provide a minimum amount of programming for children of not less than fourteen hours a week, and that such programming be directed to specific age groups.

CCT's experience with children's television in the United States and its awareness of the practices of European broadcasters indicates to CCT that the Commission should adopt rules embodying the ACT proposals. CCT hopes that the removal of commercials from children's programming will curb many of the abuses now perpetrated upon children. Similarly, the Commission's promulgation of a rule requiring a minimum number of hours of broadcasting for children per week will allow stations greater opportunities to serve creatively the children within their community of license.

But the ultimate question that must surely be in the mind of each Commissioner is whether the promulgation of these or other rules will result in the improvement of children's programming. While CCT believes that the increas-

ed programming provided for by the ACT rules will substantially increase the potential of children's television, CCT also believes that before there will be any major improvement in children's television the Commission must reaffirm the obligations of stations to ascertain the needs and interests of children. It is only through such a reaffirmation and delineation of the duties of ascertainment that stations will attempt to assess the needs and interests of children, a group comprising over 25% of their viewing audience.

Until stations ascertain the needs and interests of children in their viewing areas, they will continue to perpetuate current programming, unaware and unconcerned of its effects. While CCT believes that the current rules of the Commission require a broadcaster to ascertain the needs and interests of children in the viewing area they serve, CCT is painfully aware that broadcasters do not view themselves as under this obligation and, consequently, make no efforts to ascertain the needs and interests of the children and, therefore, do not program to meet those needs and interests.

CCT urges that the Commission adopt rules clearly setting forth the requirement that each broadcaster, as part of its ascertainment obligation, determine the needs and interests of pre-school children (ages 2 to 5), primary school children (ages 6 to 9) and elementary school children (ages 10 to 12). We urge the Commission to set forth in considerable detail the minimum effort that each broadcaster

must put forth in ascertaining these needs and interests. We believe this ascertainment process should include, but not be restricted to, the following elements:

A. Interviews and Consultations:

1. Experts "on children" including a culturally and ethnically diverse group of educators, pediatricians, child guidance counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists and other professionals in the field.
2. Members of local organizations devoted to serving children -- schools, day care centers, youth organizations, clubs.
3. Members of local child advocate groups, including such entities as the Children's Lobby.
4. Children themselves.
5. Parents and other groups concerned with children's problems, such as the PTA.

B. Supplemental Ascertainment

The interviewing and consultation process should be supplemented by other information gathering techniques, including round-table discussions, community-wide workshops and specific research projects designed by the broadcaster to ascertain special needs and interests in the licensed area.

It is CCT's belief that this ascertainment should focus on determining the needs and interests of children with a view

towards enabling broadcasters to meet those needs and interests through their programming. Thus, CCT envisions that the consultants could include not only an attempt to determine abstractly the needs and interests of children, but how the broadcasters could aid in serving those needs and interests.

CCT views such ascertainment as an on-going process and CCT requests that the Commission in its rules require each station to prepare a report no less than annually, which will be placed in the station's public file and will contain statements of the needs and interests which have been ascertained by the station. The preparation of such a report will require the station to focus on the needs and interests of the children of the community it serves.

But the ascertainment process and the preparation of the report is only a preliminary step. It is only when the station utilizes the information that it has obtained that improved television programming for children will result.

In order to insure the utilization of the information the station receives, CCT requests the Commission to issue rules requiring a broadcaster to indicate how its programming for children is serving the needs and interests which its ascertainment procedure uncovered. The Commission and the public would then be in a far better position to evaluate the performance of the station in serving the needs and interests of children. Stations, too, would be in a position to evaluate the network and syndicate feed which

they receive to determine whether it is serving the viewing audience to which it is to be broadcast.

The individual broadcaster would be able to determine how and where network and syndicate programming failed to serve his community of license. The broadcaster would be in a position to originate local programming specifically designed to fill those gaps. While it is undoubtedly true that certain needs and interests of children will be shared by many communities, others needs and interests will certainly differ depending on the area of the country, the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the community or even the climate. There will also be specifically local problems that arise from time to time.

It is CCT's belief that this dual requirement on-going ascertainment, coupled with the obligation to report on how the station's programming is designed to serve the needs and interests ascertained will encourage stations to engage in a continuing dialogue with the community to insure that the station is fully informed of the needs and interests of children and that its programming is serving those needs and interests.

Broadcasters making that effort can depend on the complete cooperation of citizens groups to assure effective utilization of community resources in producing better children's programming.

While CCT has no wild-eyed dreams that these proposed rules are a panacea for all of the ails of children's television, it does believe that a clear requirement of ascertaining the needs and interests of children will sensitize stations to the particular problems of their broadcast areas and allow them to develop meaningful programming designed to meet those needs and interests. It believes that such rules will produce greater community participation and a more effective use of community resources. CCT fervently hopes this will be a step towards better children's television.