

Hon. Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance
Frost Building South
7th Floor, 7 Queen's Park Cres
Toronto, ON
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December 2, 2020

Dear Minister Phillips,

The Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies brings together concerned health organizations and over 40 endorsing organizations who aim to raise awareness about the impact that smoking and vaping in movies has on youth smoking. The Coalition recommends a rating system to ensure that any future movies released in Ontario geared toward children and teens are free from smoking images and tobacco and e-cigarette products.

We are writing to you today regarding Schedule 12 of Bill 229, *Protect, Support, and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020*. Section 12 enacts the *Film Content Information Act, 2020*. The *Film Content Information Act, 2020* replaces longstanding legislation governing movie ratings in Ontario under the *Film Classification Act, 2005*. In effect, this change eliminates mandatory age-based movie ratings in Ontario. This builds on the government's elimination of the Ontario Film Authority last year, which had authority over film classification.

We recommend that the government amend the proposed *Film Content Information Act, 2020* to:

1. At a minimum, content warnings for films must include warnings regarding depictions of tobacco and vaping use and its harms;
2. The appropriate Ministry immediately establish a consultation process to evaluate effectiveness of an age-based rating system as opposed to the proposed information disclosures.

RE: Content warnings for films must include warnings regarding depictions of tobacco and vaping use and its harms

Health organizations internationally, including the World Health Organization and the United States Surgeon General, have drawn a causal link between smoking that is seen on screen and youth smoking initiation. As noted in the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit's report, *Youth Exposure to Tobacco in Movies in Ontario, Canada: 2002-2018*,

"A meta-analysis pooled five US studies to obtain an overall population attributable risk estimate of 37% (95% CI: 25%-52%) for adolescent smoking due to exposure to tobacco imagery in movies, meaning that 37% of youth smokers in the population are recruited to smoking due to seeing smoking in movies." (Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, 4)

The proposed *Film Content Information Act, 2020* only states the content warnings "may include" depictions of smoking or vaping, or any of the other suggested criteria in the content warning. The World Health Organization's report, *Smoke Free Movies: From Evidence to Action, Third Edition*, describes "general requirements that rating bodies merely 'consider' smoking in films without also providing specific guidelines" as "problematic"

because such descriptors "...fail to convey the harmful effect of a film's smoking imagery" (World Health Organization, 28). At a minimum, the research suggests in order to be effective, it must be mandatory for exhibitors to share the information regarding a suggested age for the intended audience for the film as well as the presence and harms of smoking and vaping to be included in the content warning, rather than just an example exhibitors may include in a content warning. As such, at a minimum we recommend mandatory content warnings on all films depicting smoking and vaping.

RE: The appropriate Ministry immediately establish a consultation process to evaluate effectiveness of an age-based rating system as opposed to the proposed information disclosures.

We feel the government should consult on the merits of an age-based rating system broadly before making the proposed changes in the *Film Content Information Act*. The evidence suggests adults only ratings for films depicting tobacco serve as a deterrent for the film industry to produce and distribute movies with smoking and vaping content. According to the Breathe California-UCSF Onscreen Tobacco Database, from 2015 to 2019, R-rated films grossed half (49%) as much at the domestic box office as PG-13 films. Higher ratings can also limit the value of contracts for the film's "downstream" revenue from foreign cinema distribution, physical, and electronic home video media and syndication. An adult only rating creates a market disincentive for the film industry to include smoking and vaping use all together in its movies. A consultation will allow for the government to consider these impacts before it makes its final decision.

We believe it is critical that the depictions of smoking and vaping be included as part of the information that is considered in terms of whether a movie is appropriate for a given audience, particularly a movie otherwise geared toward children or younger audiences. In conclusion, while the Ontario Coalition for Smoke-Free Movies appreciates the acknowledgment of the risks associated with exhibiting movies with smoking and vaping content, in order to be impactful, the government must consider the recommendations outlined in this letter.

For more information, please contact Steve Piazza, Manager, Advocacy at the Canadian Cancer Society at stephen.piazza@cancer.ca, or Liz Scanlon, Director, Health Policy and Systems, Ontario at the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario at liz.scanlon@heartandstroke.ca.

Best regards,



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

Canadian Cancer Society



Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario

Cc: Hon. Lisa Thompson, Minister of Government and Consumer Services
Hon. Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Tourism, Sport, and Culture Industries
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