



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

E Goodman  
23 Budgen Drive  
Redhill  
Surrey  
RH1 2QB

21<sup>st</sup> February 2008

Dear Mr Goodman,

Thank you for taking the time to write to me regarding the British Board of Film Classification (Accountability to Parliament and Appeals) Bill, due to have its second reading in the House of Commons on 29<sup>th</sup> February.

As I am sure you appreciate, film classification is not an exact science, and as such, there are bound to be some decisions made by the BBFC that come in for criticism. Your original letter made reference to the films 'Natural Born Killers' 'Reservoir Dogs' 'Trainspotting' and 'Kids'. While I agree that these films contain adult content, they were all classified as being suitable for over 18s only. Films like these may not be to everyone's taste, but there is no conclusive evidence that people who watch violent content in films like these go on to commit violent acts themselves.

As a Liberal Democrat, I believe that censorship must only be imposed where absolutely necessary, and where material can be shown beyond reasonable doubt to have adversely influenced the viewer. I do not believe it should be the role of the BBFC, and certainly not politicians, to censor films purely on matters of taste. It is up to adults to make their own decisions over which films they choose to watch.

I do not think film makers should shy away from difficult subjects. I will continue to defend the right not just of filmmakers, but of journalists, broadcasters, artists and bloggers to challenge the status quo, open up debate, make us think, and even make us feel uncomfortable at times.

I am extremely apprehensive about politicians playing a significant role in regulating films – a situation that this Bill aims to create. I think it is very important that the BBFC has the freedom to operate independently from any political agenda, and fear this could be compromised if politicians were able to appoint BBFC board members or to force a classification review after a BBFC decision has been made. At present, the BBFC works with the public to come up with generally acceptable standards for film classification. The BBFC guidelines are created as a result of extensive public



consultation and are therefore, broadly speaking, a reflection of public opinion rather than an attempt to shape it.

There is no doubt that children must be protected from adult content. We have a classification system currently in place that seems to me to be reasonable. However, I am concerned by the ease with which children are able to purchase or rent films which are classified as unsuitable for them. I welcome further research into this area and am therefore pleased that the Government has commissioned The Byron Review into children's engagement with new technologies.

With my concerns regarding extreme material being addressed in the ways just outlined, I feel all the Bill would achieve is greater interference by politicians into an area that should be very separate from them. As such, I cannot support this Bill and will be voting against it. I will, however, continue to campaign for better enforcement of existing film classifications to make sure children are not easily able to access adult content.

Thank you again for writing to me on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Don Foster  
*MP for Bath*

*Liberal Democrat Culture, Media and Sport Spokesperson*