



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

January 25, 2005

Ms. Pat Mitchell  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Public Broadcasting Service  
1320 Braddock Place  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

The Department of Education has strong and very serious concerns about a specific Ready-To-Learn television episode, yet to be aired, that has been developed under a cooperative agreement between the Department and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). The episode -- "Sugartime!" -- is part of the "Postcards from Buster" series, and would feature throughout the show families headed by gay couples.

As you know, the cooperative agreement that PBS is using to support these programs is designed to prepare preschool and elementary age children for school. A principal focus of the law authorizing funding for the Ready-To-Learn program is facilitating student academic achievement. In the fiscal year 2005 appropriations conference report (H. R. Conf. Rep. No. 108-792 at 1236-1237 (2004)), Congress reiterated the unique mission of Ready-To-Learn, which is *"to use the television medium to help prepare preschool age children for school. The television programs that must fulfill this mission are to be specifically designed for this purpose, with the highest attention to production quality and validity of research-based educational objectives, content, and materials."* In addition, you should also know that two years ago the Senate Appropriations Committee raised questions about the accountability of funds appropriated for Ready-To-Learn programs.

We believe the "Sugartime!" episode does not come within these purposes or within the intent of Congress, and would undermine the overall objective of the Ready-To-Learn program -- to produce programming that reaches as many children and families as possible. Many parents would not want their young children exposed to the life-styles portrayed in this episode. Congress' and the Department's purpose in funding this programming certainly was not to introduce this kind of subject matter to children, particularly through the powerful and intimate medium of television.

In light of these concerns, we have several requests. First, if you air the show, we must insist that you remove from the specific episode the Department's seal, as well as any other logo or statement indicating that the Department funded, endorsed, sponsored or

was involved in the development, creation, or production of the episode, and, in addition, that you also remove any such reference in any materials about the program. Second, we request that you notify your member stations of the nature of the content of these programs and ask that they review the programs before deciding whether to air them. Third, in the interest of avoiding embroiling the Ready-To-Learn program in a controversy that will only hurt the program, we believe you should strongly consider refunding to the Department the Federal education funds that were used for the episode.

Finally, you can be assured that in the future the Department will be more clear as to its expectations for any future programming that it funds.

Sincerely,

/S/

Margaret Spellings