

# NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
Wednesday, January 19, 2000

For More Information Contact:  
Gary Ruskin (202) 296-2787  
Jason Catlett (908) 753-7861  
Jim Metrock (205) 612-3376

## **Coalition Asks States to Protect Children from ZapMe! Corp. Privacy Invasion, Wants Corporations to Sever Partnerships with ZapMe!**

Responding to the ZapMe! Corp.'s invasion of children's privacy in schools, a coalition of progressive, conservative and privacy organizations and scholars today urged all 50 governors and chairs of education committees in all 50 state legislatures to protect children from ZapMe!, and asked corporations to break their partnerships with ZapMe!.

Following is the text of the letter to Governor Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania.  
Dear Governor Ridge:

We write to alert you to a new form of electronic privacy invasion that is taking root in the schools.

The ZapMe! Corp. loans to schools a package of 15 computers, along with a satellite dish and an Internet server. ZapMe! then requires students to receive an electronic ID in order to use these computers. Schools may not install software on the computers without permission; they must pay the cost of insuring the computers; and they must use the computers for an average of four hours per schoolday. ZapMe! has designed these computers to serve as the front end of a sophisticated marketing and advertising scheme.

\$ ZapMe's corporate sponsors may collect and distribute personal information about the children, including their names, addresses and telephone numbers.

\$ ZapMe! itself monitors the activities of the children on the Web, for commercial purposes. According to *Associated Press*, ZapMe! breaks the data down by age, sex and ZIP code. It delivers this information to advertisers and marketers, who use it to target students in school with laser-like precision.

\$ ZapMe! directs advertising at schoolchildren via the ZapMe! Internet browser.

\$ ZapMe! requires students three times a year to bring ZapMe! corporate sponsor marketing materials home to their parents.

In essence, ZapMe! plants computers in the schools as advertising delivery, market research and surveillance machines. It turns the schools and the compulsory schooling laws into a means of gaining access to a captive audience of children in order to extract market research from them and to advertise to them. Parents entrust their children to the schools -- especially

public schools -- for the purpose of learning and developing character, not to serve as guinea pigs for advertising and marketing firms.

We oppose ZapMe's business operations in the schools. ZapMe violates the privacy of schoolchildren, misuses the schools and compulsory schooling laws to force children to watch ads during school time, and degrades the moral authority of schools and teachers by turning them into instruments of corporate advertising and marketing.

At a minimum, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education should take steps to restore parents some control over the uses of their children for commercial gain. Specifically, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education should require ZapMe!, and any company like it, to

\$ inform parents fully regarding the activities of the company in question, and to obtain written consent from parents before gathering any personal information from their children; and,

\$ disclose fully to parents any and all uses of personal information and other data obtained from their children, including specific corporations that purchase or use this information, and the specific ways in which they use it.

The basic issue here is the power of parents to control the influences upon their own children, and their children's personal information. While children are at school, parents are entitled to know who obtains information about their children, and precisely how that information is used. They would demand to know this if ZapMe! executives came to their door at night and sought it in person. These executives should not be permitted to cloak their activities from parents nor hide behind the bureaucracies of the schools.

If you have any questions about ZapMe! Corp., or want more information, please feel free to contact Gary Ruskin of Commercial Alert or Jim Metrock of Obligation, Inc.

Sincerely,

Joan Almon, U.S. Coordinator, Alliance for Childhood

Robert Bulmash, President, Private Citizen, Inc.

Bettye M. Caldwell, Past President, National Association for the Education of Young Children

Jason Catlett, President, Junkbusters Corp.

Gregg Davis, Director, Camphill Soltane

Gloria DeGaetano, co-author, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*

Mark A. Finser, President, Rudolf Steiner Foundation

Roy F. Fox, Assoc. Prof. of Eng. Ed. & Lit., U. of MO-Columbia; author, *Harvesting Minds*

Beth Givens, Director, Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

Jane M. Healy, Ph.D., author, *Failure to Connect*

Michael F. Jacobson, co-author, *Marketing Madness*

Jean Kilbourne, author, *Deadly Persuasion*

Velma LaPoint, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Human Development, Howard University  
Diane Levin, Professor of Education, Wheelock College; author, *Remote Control Childhood*  
James Love, Director, Consumer Project on Technology  
Bob McCannon, Executive Director, Mew Mexico Media Literacy Project  
Jim Metrock, President, Obligation, Inc.  
Mark Crispin Miller, Professor of Media Ecology, New York University  
Kathryn C. Montgomery, Ph.D., President, Center for Media Education  
Kate Moody, Ed.D., University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston  
Gary Ruskin, Director, Commercial Alert  
Phyllis Schlafly, President, Eagle Forum  
Richard E. Sclove, Founder, The Loka Institute; author, *Democracy & Technology*  
Shari Steele, Director of Legal Services, Electronic Frontier Foundation  
Betsy Taylor, Executive Director, Center for a New American Dream  
David Walsh, Ph.D. President, National Institute on Media and the Family  
Donald E. Wildmon, President, American Family Association

<-----letter ends here----->

Letters were sent to ZapMe! corporate partners and sponsors, including Amazon.com, Ask Jeeves, Inc, Dell Computer Co., General Electric Co, Gilat Satellite Networks Ltd., Microsoft Co., NEC America, Inc., School Specialty, Inc., Sylvan Learning Systems, Inc., Toshiba America Inc. Xerox Co., and Yahoo! Inc.

Following is the text of the letter to Michael Dell, CEO of Dell Computer.

Dear Mr. Dell:

We are writing to urge you to reconsider your business partnership with the ZapMe! Corp. ZapMe! represents a commercial incursion into the school which bodes ill for both children and schools.

As you know, ZapMe! loans to schools a package of 15 computers, along with a satellite dish and an Internet server. ZapMe! then requires students to receive an electronic ID in order to use these computers. Schools may not install software on the computers without permission; they must pay the cost of insuring the computers; and they must use the computers for an average of four hours per schoolday. ZapMe! has designed these computers to serve as the front end of a sophisticated marketing and advertising scheme.

\$ ZapMe=s corporate sponsors may collect and distribute personal information about the children, including their names, addresses and telephone numbers.

\$ ZapMe! itself monitors the activities of the children on the Web, for commercial purposes. According to *Associated Press*, ZapMe! breaks the data down by age, sex and ZIP code. It delivers this information to advertisers and marketers, who use it to

target students in school with laser-like precision.@

- \$ ZapMe! directs advertising at schoolchildren via the ZapMe! Internet browser.
- \$ ZapMe! requires students three times a year to bring ZapMe! corporate sponsor marketing materials home to their parents.

ZapMe's business model is beyond redemption. In essence, it plants computers in the schools as advertising delivery, market research and surveillance machines. It turns the schools and the compulsory schooling laws into a means of gaining access to a captive audience of children in order to extract market research from them and to advertise to them.

We find this utterly unacceptable. ZapMe! violates the privacy of schoolchildren, misuses the schools and compulsory schooling laws to force children to watch advertising during school time, and degrades the moral authority of schools and teachers by turning them into instruments of corporate advertising and marketing.

We would be grateful for your earliest response indicating whether you intend to continue your partnership with ZapMe! Please address this to Gary Ruskin at Commercial Alert, or Jim Metrock of Obligation, Inc.

Sincerely,

Joan Almon, U.S. Coordinator, Alliance for Childhood

Robert Bulmash, President, Private Citizen, Inc.

Bettye M. Caldwell, Past President, National Association for the Education of Young Children

Jason Catlett, President, Junkbusters Corp.

Gregg Davis, Director, Camphill Soltane

Gloria DeGaetano, co-author, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*

Mark A. Finser, President, Rudolf Steiner Foundation

Roy F. Fox, Assoc. Prof. of Eng. Ed. & Lit., U. of MO-Columbia; author, *Harvesting Minds*

Beth Givens, Director, Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

Jane M. Healy, Ph.D., author, *Failure to Connect*

Michael F. Jacobson, co-author, *Marketing Madness*

Jean Kilbourne, author, *Deadly Persuasion*

Velma LaPoint, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Human Development, Howard University

Diane Levin, Professor of Education, Wheelock College; author, *Remote Control Childhood*

James Love, Director, Consumer Project on Technology

Bob McCannon, Executive Director, Mew Mexico Media Literacy Project

Jim Metrock, President, Obligation, Inc.

Mark Crispin Miller, Professor of Media Ecology, New York University

Kathryn C. Montgomery, Ph.D., President, Center for Media Education

Kate Moody, Ed.D., University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

Gary Ruskin, Director, Commercial Alert

Phyllis Schlafly, President, Eagle Forum

Richard E. Sclove, Founder, The Loka Institute; author, *Democracy & Technology*

Shari Steele, Director of Legal Services, Electronic Frontier Foundation

Betsy Taylor, Executive Director, Center for a New American Dream

David Walsh, Ph.D. President, National Institute on Media and the Family

Donald E. Wildmon, President, American Family Association

<-----letter ends here----->

Commercial Alert opposes the excesses of commercialism, advertising and marketing.

Commercial Alert=s web page on ZapMe! Corp. is at

<<http://www.essential.org/alert/zapme/index.html>>. Commercial Alert=s main web page is at

<<http://www.essential.org/alert/>>.