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Bill to let companies sanitize movies moves fast

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Legislation that would enable parents to skip movie scenes deemed offensive on DVDs is moving quickly in Congress. It also would create stiffer penalties for people who bring video cameras into theaters to make pirated copies.

"Parents have a right to decide what their children see on television and no one should deny them that right," said Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, who introduced the bill in the House. "Fortunately, technology exists that shields children from violence, sex, and profanity. It is the electronic equivalent of fast-forwarding over unwanted content."

The legislation was introduced because Hollywood studios and directors had sued to stop the makers and distributors of the technology. The movies' creators had argued that changing the content would violate their copyrights.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said the bill would create an exemption in the copyright laws to make sure companies like ClearPlay, a Salt Lake City business, won't get sued out of existence.

The bill "will help to end aggressive litigation threatening the viability of small companies like ClearPlay which are busy creating innovative technologies for consumers that allow them to tailor their home viewing experience to their own individual or family preferences," Hatch said last week.

The House Judiciary Committee is expected to take up the legislation soon. The Senate passed a similar bill by voice vote Tuesday.

In addition, the legislation introduced in the House and passed by the Senate would create new penalties for criminals who use small video cameras to record and sell bootlegged copies of first-run films.

The legislation would stop "the most egregious form of copyright piracy plaguing the

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entertainment industry today, the piracy of film, movies, and other copyrighted materials before copyright owners have had the opportunity to market fully their products," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

If the bill becomes law, people convicted of using cameras to bootleg movies could face as much as three years in federal prison plus fines, with the sentence doubling to six years upon a second conviction.

"The growing piracy of movies, music and software is hurting the ability of artists to be compensated for their hard work," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California. The bill "will ensure that those who steal the creative works of others will be held accountable."

The Senate bill is S. 167. The House bill is HR 357.

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