

AFEE Statement on Game Delistings and Content Restrictions

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In recent weeks, multiple digital game distribution platforms, including Steam and itch.io, have reportedly removed or delisted a significant number of mature-rated titles in response to external pressure exerted by advocacy groups and third-party payment service providers.

To safeguard developers' rights and to ensure players' access to diverse content, the Association for Freedom of Entertainment Expression (AFEE) issues the following statement.

Appreciation and Appeals to Distribution Platforms

(1) Respect for Established Rating and Zoning Systems

Platforms such as Steam and itch.io have implemented robust age-rating systems and regional filters that help players access content safely while enabling the responsible distribution of mature-rated titles. We commend these efforts and encourage continued reliance on such mechanisms rather than resorting to broad content restrictions.

(2) Support for Resisting Unjustified External Pressures

We have observed a growing number of advocacy campaigns and non-binding demands from third-party payment service providers. We urge platforms to resist unjustified censorship and refrain from removing lawful mature-rated titles solely due to such pressures.

(3) Avoiding the Suspension or Delisting of Legal Content

Removing legal content undermines developers' rights by cutting off revenue opportunities and damaging reputations, while also limiting players' freedom of choice. We call for open dialogue with communities and policy approaches that protect lawful creative works instead of restricting them.

(4) Flexible Regional Compliance Measures

We support the use of region-specific content filters and localized restrictions, where necessary, to comply with national laws and cultural standards. This approach helps ensure that legal content remains accessible to as many players as possible without requiring broad delistings.

(5) Protection of Developer Rights and Player Access

Video games represent a vital form of cultural expression. The rights of developers' to explore diverse themes and the rights of players' to access a wide range of content must be upheld. We urge platforms to protect these rights and express our appreciation to those who continue to support creative diversity.

Our Support for Platforms

AFEE appreciates the long-standing efforts of platforms like Steam and itch.io to support creative expression in gaming while maintaining responsible rating and zoning practices.

We strongly urge platforms to continue resisting undue external pressures, and we reaffirm our support for those that uphold developers' rights and safeguard players' access to diverse and lawful content worldwide.

Background

In July 2025, both Steam and itch.io delisted or made inaccessible large numbers of mature-rated and explicit titles. Reports indicate that advocacy group campaigns pressured major payment service providers—including Visa, Mastercard, and PayPal—resulting in stricter content policies. (*1)

On itch.io, all NSFW-tagged titles were removed from search and browsing listings, impacting over 20,000 games without prior notice. (*2)

Steam revised its Steamworks documentation to ban adult-rated games deemed incompatible with payment service standards, leading to mass delistings shortly thereafter. (*3)

Critically acclaimed titles, including LGBTQ-themed works and games addressing sensitive topics such as mental health and domestic violence, were also reportedly affected. This has sparked widespread concern regarding unjustified censorship and developer rights. (*4)

Community protests have emerged across Reddit, Bluesky, and Change.org, with petitions exceeding 170,000 signatures delivered to payment processors, alongside coordinated calls and emails demanding restoration of affected games. (*5)

About AFEE

We, the Association for Freedom of Entertainment Expression (AFEE), are an independent, non-partisan advocacy group in Japan dedicated to defending the right to freedom of expression in entertainment, particularly manga, animation, and games, which are deeply rooted in Japanese grassroots culture. Since 2013, we have carried out a range of activities, including organizing non-partisan campaigns at Comic Market—the world's largest doujinshi convention—, publishing journals on freedom of expression, and hosting study sessions. (*6)

Association for Freedom of Entertainment Expression
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<https://afee.jp/english/>

Footnotes and References

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<https://www.wired.com/story/steam-itchio-are-pulling-porn-games-censorship/>
- *itch.io removes "all mature games" from search results page* (AUTOMATON)
<https://automaton-media.com/articles/newsjp/itch-io-20250724-350417/>

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- *Update on NSFW content* (itch.io)
<https://itch.io/updates/update-on-nsfw-content>
- *Itch.io follows Steam in removing adult games* (The Verge)
<https://www.theverge.com/news/712890/itch-removes-adult-nsfw-games-steam-payment-providers>

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- *Steamworks Documentation* (Steamworks)
<https://partner.steamgames.com/doc/gettingstarted/onboarding?language=english>
- *Steam bans content that violates payment service provider standards* (4Gamer)
<https://www.4gamer.net/games/999/G999905/20250716060/>
- *Valve confirms removals due to payment processor requests* (Game*Spark)
<https://www.gamespark.jp/article/2025/07/19/155183.html>
- *More Japanese adult games removed under new rules* (Game*Spark)
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- *Credit processor pressure sparks international debate, Elon Musk reacts* (Game*Spark)
<https://www.gamespark.jp/article/2025/07/22/155235.html>

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- *Why did thousands of adult titles just disappear from the biggest PC gaming marketplaces?* (Guardian)
<https://www.theguardian.com/games/2025/jul/29/why-did-adult-titles-disappear-from-steam-itch-pc-gaming-payment-processors>
- *Payment processors face organized campaign after adult game censorship* (BigGo)
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- *Gamers flood Visa and Mastercard with calls and emails over censorship* (Gigazine)
<https://gigazine.net/news/20250729-visa-mastercard-overwhelmed-gamer-fury/>
- *Visa and Mastercard are getting overwhelmed by gamer fury over censorship* (Polygon)
<https://www.polygon.com/news/616835/visa-mastercard-steam-itchio-campaign-adult-games>

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- *About AFEE*
<https://afee.jp/english/>