



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



YOUTH COACHES' BEST PRACTICES

Youth sports programs are an exciting way to build civic pride, family togetherness, sportsmanship, and athletic and cognitive abilities. Many agencies either directly operate these youth sports programs through their Recreation Departments or indirectly sponsor the leagues by offering the use of their parks and other facilities. To make this happen, volunteer adult coaches must dedicate their time and expertise. This bulletin will provide best practices to protect the children, coaches, and the agency.

In 1986, New Jersey became the first state in the nation to enact legislation to protect volunteer athletic coaches, managers, and officials from lawsuits. Often referred to as the “Little League Law”, 2A:62A-6 et. seq. extends partial civil immunity to volunteers who have attended a program” that meets the Minimum Standards for Volunteer Coaches Safety Orientation and Training Skills (N.J.A.C. 5:52). One such program is offered in conjunction with Rutgers Youth Sports Research Council and N.J. Recreation and Parks Association. The [Rutgers SAFETY Clinic](#) includes training in the psychological aspects of coaching, general coaching principles, proper training and conditioning of young athletes, and first aid considerations of coaching. **It's strongly recommended that agencies that directly operate or indirectly sponsor youth athletics require all coaches to take this course or an approved equivalent class as a condition for using their fields, courts, facilities, or buildings.**

In 2018, New Jersey extended the statute of limitations for child abuse and neglect cases substantially, thus placing local officials and employees at a far greater risk. **[Under New Jersey Law, an official may be held liable for the abuse or neglect of a child if he or she fails to implement appropriate safeguards to protect the child while the minor has been entrusted to the care of the organization.](#)** A valid cause of action can be filed by an alleged victim well after the official has left office. It is, therefore, critically important for officials to establish and monitor policies and procedures designed to safeguard minors entrusted to the care of the public entity. The MEL encourages all agencies that have contact with minors to adopt a written program and annually train and review the policy with all supervisors and adult volunteer leaders of youth programs. In addition, the following best practices should be implemented:

1. All prospective employees and volunteers must pass a complete background check, which includes fingerprint identification, checking Megan's Law registration for New Jersey and other states where the individual has previously resided, a credit check, a motor vehicle record check, and personal and professional references. Negative or questionable results must be reviewed before the applicant is permitted to work with minors.

[NJ MEL Qualified Background Check Vendors](#)

- CastleBranch, Wilmington, NC – [Response Document](#)
 - Adam Safeguard & Inquiry Systems, Inc., Toms River, NJ – [Response Document](#)
 - Southern Background Services, LLC., Hazlehurst, GA - [Response Document](#)
 - Tabb Inc., Chester, NJ - [Response Document 1](#), [Response Document 2](#)
 - TruView BSI, LLC., Hicksville, NY - [Response Document](#)
2. Prospective employees and volunteers must complete the training program developed by the organization before they applicant is permitted to work with minors.
 3. Complete background checks should be conducted on an initial and every three years thereafter. Training should be conducted annually.

Please visit [MSI Protection & Safe Treatment of Minors](#) for all the resources to assist your agency with establishing your policies and procedures. Members are strongly encouraged to consult their agency's attorney about drafting user agreements with any organization and agencies using their public facilities, which should include, at a minimum, the NJ MEL insurance requirements, a 'hold harmless', and a mandatory process for the organizations to conduct background checks.