

My name is Sandra Austin Goldstein and I am Newington resident and a mother of two. I am writing to you today to endorse Proposed Bill RSB-193.

Four years ago, I began researching youth baseball safety when my 8-year-old son was hit in the face with a baseball. As I read about faceguards, I discovered information about convicted sex offenders and criminals infiltrating the Little League organization and serving as volunteers and I have been researching this shocking subject ever since.

What is true for baseball is also true for youth camps, where workers and volunteers can infiltrate them because background checks are not required for camp employees in the state of Connecticut.

With a mentality of “not in my backyard” or, “he looks like a nice guy”, most often checks are not done when they are strictly voluntary. If they are done on this basis, it is often using the free National Sex Offender Registry (SOR), which is an extremely poor substitute for a background check.

The National Council of Youth Sports (NCYS) indicates just how ineffective using the SOR is. “Several organizations have responded to the recent attention on sexual abuse in youth-serving organizations by requiring volunteers and employees in their organizations to undergo a simple search of a state’s sex-offender registry. Unfortunately, this provides a false sense of security given the fact that according to a survey of law enforcement officials responsible for sex offender registries in all 50 states, police have lost track of one in four of the sex offenders who are supposed to be registered.” according to their website, www.NCYS.org.

Last year, the National SOR contained less than 740,000 individuals; a criminal background check would have provided information on 11.5 million sex-related crimes. (Source: 2012 Little League Background Checks by LexisNexis, Little League Inc. website)

How can this be? The reasons include:

- Crimes that qualify convicted criminals to be put on the SOR vary from state to state. (Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public website)

- Some offenders are not subject to public disclosure as defined by the laws of their state. (Sources: U.S. Department of Justice, Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public website and The Official Website of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS).)

- Sex-related crimes are often pleaded down to lesser offenses not listed on SORs. (Sources: Official Website of the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) and Criminalbackgroundrecords.com website)

- What qualifies as a felony sex crime against a child in one state might be considered a misdemeanor in another and might not be found in the sex offender registry. (Source: Abika.com website)

- States such as Pennsylvania do not state whether or not the victim is a minor if the offender’s conviction occurred prior to November 30, 2006 in the SOR. (Source: Pennsylvania State Police website)

- The dates that qualify convicted criminals to be listed in the registry vary by state.

however, expected to have taken steps to safeguard participants that would meet or exceed a reasonable standard when compared to other organizations in similar circumstances. What constitutes this reasonable standard has changed significantly in the last decade.” (Source NCYS website.)

“It may have been considered unreasonable 10 years ago to expect youth-serving organizations to conduct background checks of prospective employees and volunteers. But 10 years ago, the criminal and sexual offender databases were either nonexistent or not legally accessible to youth-serving organizations. Today, however, the availability of online databases, as well as statutory changes enabling better communication between states and federal agencies, has made conducting background checks both accessible and reasonable.” (Source: NCYS website.)

Changes must be made to reduce the safety risks to the children who attend camps, such as:

1. Arrests and suspensions-There must be a policy of disclosure of information to parents when camp workers are arrested. There must also be a mandatory suspension of the worker who is arrested until a resolution for the crime is determined through a court of law.

2. Personal biases must be eliminated from the decision making process so that workers with disqualifying crimes cannot be allowed to work or volunteer.

Dan Kirby, Risk Manager of Little League Inc. warned that you can't judge a book by its cover when it comes to volunteers. He cited an example of an elementary school coach who was arrested on suspicion of killing his wife in 2004. At the time of the arrest, other convictions for manslaughter and battery in other states were revealed. Kirby described in the Little League safety newsletter how that could just as easily been a Little League coach: “People could have thought, ‘Hey, he’s a heck of a guy. He’s a coach for the elementary school girls’ basketball team. Let’s ask him to coach. We don’t need to do a background check on him.” Kirby noted. “But unless you do the check, you don’t know what people are like. You can’t know. People move around, especially if they have something in their past they want to hide.” (Source: Author unknown, (2004, April-May), Think You Know Somebody? Think Again. *ASAP Little League Inc. newsletter, Vol. 11, No. 3*)

The National Council of Youth Sports recommends that youth organizations abuse/molestation management programs be audited yearly to ensure that, “the program that has been developed and implemented is being followed and has not been weakened or eliminated by employee or board member turnover.” (Source: NCYS.org website.)

3. An across the board policy should be in effect designating which crimes would make a worker or volunteer ineligible for youth camps.

Camps should work with such sports safety groups as the International Alliance for Youth Sports (IAYS) to establish criteria as to what crimes should prevent a volunteer’s application from being accepted so that a standard is developed that can be adhered to. For example, IAYS recommends that prospective volunteers with convictions of such crimes as animal cruelty, domestic violence and weapons violations be banned from volunteering and that drunken driving, less-serious drug crimes and petty theft applicant approval could be at the discretion of the league. (Source: Hunt, D. (2007, April 26), Sidelined by their Past, (Albany, NY.) Times-Union)

Parents should be vigilant to watch for signs of sex offenders (Source: Lester, P. (2003, May 4), Youth league's background checks questioned, The Doylestown PA., *Intelligencer*), which all camps should publish in their handbooks. These should also include statements encouraging parents to talk with their children about what to do if something happens to them with a camp worker or volunteer that they do not feel comfortable with.

Not true. While sex abusers cut across socioeconomic levels, educational levels and race, the average age of a sex offender has been established at 32.

“Strangers are responsible for most of the sexual abuse.”

Fact: 80-85% of all sexual abuse cases in the US are perpetrated by an individual familiar to the victim. Less than 20% of all abusers are strangers.

“Most sex abusers suffer from some form of serious mental illness or psychosis.”

Not true. The actual figure is more like 10%, almost exactly the same as the figure found in the general population of the United States.

“Most sex abusers are homosexuals.”

Also not true. Most are heterosexual.

“Children usually lie about sexual abuse, anyway.”

In fact, children rarely lie about being sexually abused. If they say it, don't ignore it.

“It only happens to girls.”

While females do comprise the largest number of sexual abuse victims, it is now believed that the number for male victims is much higher than reported.”

(Source: The 2011 Park View, CA Little League ASAP Safety Manual)