
Maryland Youth Camp
Safety Advisory Council

April 2, 2020

RE: Annual Report on Youth Camps for 2019

Dear Secretary Neall,

Allison Abbondante
Camp Owner/Manager-For Profit

Anita D. Anderson
Camp Owner/Manager-Non Profit

Kelly R. Campbell
National Camping Organization

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National Camping Organization
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Camp Owner/Manager-ACA

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Local Health Department

The Maryland Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council is a Governor-appointed board of camp professionals, public health experts, and concerned citizens who advise and assist Maryland Department of Health in developing regulations for camps. This letter fulfills the Council's obligation, pursuant to Health - General §14-404, Annotated Code of Maryland, to provide you with information for the summer of 2019 regarding the number of youth camps, facilities and campers in our state. Attached you will find the report supporting these requirements.

In 2019, there were roughly 2,500,000 camper days in Maryland. A camper day is defined by each day a camper attends a summer camp (day or overnight). For example, if camper John Smith & Suzy Smith were to each attend a 5-day camp, this would total 10 camper days. This method of reporting more accurately captures the attendance of summer camps statewide, since it accounts for campers who might attend the same camp twice or attend different camps at varying session lengths.

Camps provide much needed childcare, supervision, opportunity, and access to nutrition when school is not in session, which in turn creates a safer community. Maryland has comprehensive regulations protecting the health and safety of children attending these programs. To ensure that these critical safety regulations are met, the Council makes the following recommendations:

1. The Council strongly recommends that Maryland continue to fully fund the Youth Camp Program. Last year, there were nearly 1,000 youth camps in Maryland who completed and submitted the required annual report. Annual inspections of camps require staff and resources. As camps are seasonal, the need for inspectors is also seasonal, with most of the direct costs incurred towards the end of the fiscal year. During times of budget shortfalls, it may look attractive to cut from these budgets, but doing so is at the risk of health and safety of Maryland youth.

2. Ensure the Department has all the resources to continue their online data collection and entry efforts. Over the past few years,

the Department has created an online licensing and reporting system. This online system has been rolled out and now allows for more efficient data collection. Camps are required to complete an end of season report and incident reports for serious accidents and incidents that affect camper health. Collecting these reports online saves time and reduces the amount of manual data entry by the Department, which in turn provides the Department and this Council with more up-to-date information on trends in injuries and illnesses. In addition, it allows the Department and this Council to focus its resources on areas outside of data entry.

3. Improve the compliance of non-licensed camps by providing expertise to those camps beginning the licensing process. The process of becoming licensed can initially seem overwhelming for newer camps, but doing so ensures that they have taken steps to mitigate risk of injury or harm to children attending their programs. The Department has found that unlicensed camps may avoid regulations. Ensuring the Department has adequate staff and resources available to assist camps with this process will ensure compliance and a safer camp community.

4. Educate the community about the licensing process. Many parents are not aware that Maryland requires youth camps to be licensed. Some cost effective ideas to educate the public are to:

- a. Provide public access to an online database of camps that are licensed;
- b. Use public service announcements;

5. Ensure that our state's summer camps are adequately prepared to identify and respond to mental health issues that increasingly arise in summer camp settings. The Council is recommending (a) adding additional fields to the state's incident reporting system in order to collect data on mental health crises in our camps, and (b) setting guidelines on how camps gather mental health information and respond to real-time incidents to ensure our children's mental health is cared for throughout the year by all Maryland childcare providers.

Respectfully Submitted,



Carla DeWitt
Public Representative
Council Co-Chair



Rabbi Rami Schwartzer
National Camping Organization
Council Co-Chair

CC: MDH Office of Support Services
MDH Center for Healthy Homes and Community Services