



## MEDIA STATEMENT

### **On the Record Response and Information – Attributable to the Boy Scouts of America:**

We care deeply about all victims of child abuse and sincerely apologize to anyone who was harmed during their time in Scouting. We believe victims, we support them, and we have paid for unlimited counseling by a provider of their choice. Nothing is more important than the safety and protection of children in Scouting and we are outraged that there have been times when individuals took advantage of our programs to abuse innocent children.

Throughout our history, we have enacted strong youth protection policies to prevent future abuse, including mandatory youth protection trainings and a formal leader-selection process that includes criminal background checks. Since the 1920s, we have maintained a Volunteer Screening Database to prevent individuals accused of abuse or inappropriate conduct from joining or re-entering our programs, a practice recommended in 2007 by the Centers for Disease Control for all youth-serving organizations.

At no time have we ever knowingly allowed a perpetrator to work with youth, and we mandate that all leaders, volunteers and staff members nationwide immediately report any abuse allegation to law enforcement.

Regarding the volunteer database specifically:

First - to be clear, every instance of suspected abuse is reported to law enforcement.

The database system is one of the approaches most often recommended by experts to keep kids safe and is a collection of information on individuals who, due to past inappropriate behavior or suspicion of inappropriate behavior, are prohibited from participating in BSA programs. It is an ongoing tool the BSA uses to keep youth safe from potential perpetrators.

**Every instance of suspected abuse is reported to law enforcement.** The organization went back decades and reported to instances of abuse to law enforcement when it may have been unclear whether prior incidences had been reported. It is also worth noting that **a majority of the names in the database are already available to the public through media stories or police reports.**

Here are additional relevant facts regarding the VSD:

- Individuals are added to our Volunteer Screening Database (VSD) based on violations of our policies, or suspected violations of our policies. They don't need to have been convicted to be added to the VSD. We have a very low threshold for removing someone from our scouting programs. Again – this is because our priority is to protect kids, first and foremost, above all else.
- When an individual is added to the VSD, they are removed entirely from any Scouting program. They are removed entirely and prohibited from re-joining anywhere.
- To reiterate, every instance of suspected abuse is reported to law enforcement.

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The VSD is a mechanism for keeping kids safe within Scouting. We believe victims and routinely remove individuals based on only allegations of inappropriate behavior. Once the individual has been removed from Scouting and has been reported to law enforcement, the BSA has no other avenue for further investigation or public disclosure.

**This is precisely why we fully support and advocate for – the creation of a national registry overseen by a governmental entity, similar to the national sex offender registry, of those who are suspected of child abuse or inappropriate behavior with a child, and thus allowing all youth serving organizations to share and access such information.**

- The BSA also regularly convenes leaders from other youth-serving organizations, as well as experts in the youth protection field, and the sharing of information is one of the key focus areas of those discussions.

Regarding Dr. Janet Warren's study: the BSA has retained Dr. Janet Warren of the University of Virginia since 2013 to conduct ongoing research of the Volunteer Screening Database and provide us with information and recommendations on how we could make it more effective in protecting children from predators. The bottom line is we want to keep kids safe, and we want to keep perpetrators away from kids.

We have a toll-free helpline (1-844-726-8871) and email contact address (scouts1st@scouting.org) for these sensitive matters. As I mentioned earlier, we offer unlimited counseling with a provider of their choice to any Scout, former Scout, or the family member of any Scout who suffered abuse during their time in Scouting.

**Additional on-the-record information on Youth Protection, attributable to the Boy Scouts of America:**

The BSA has adopted some of the strongest barriers to abuse found in any youth-serving organization and we take the responsibility to uphold those barriers seriously. Today, we are considered by many of the top experts in youth protection policies to be leaders in this effort. The safety and protection of children in our Scouting programs is our top priority. We have screening procedures for registered leaders and act swiftly to report abuse allegations to law enforcement.

- Decades ago, we adopted some of the strongest barriers to abuse found in any youth-serving organization, and we take the responsibility to uphold those barriers seriously. Today, we are considered by many of the top experts in youth protection to be leaders in this effort.
- Youth protection training is mandatory for all registered leaders, and we also provide educational materials to parent and Scouts.
- The BSA has a formal leader-selection process that includes criminal background checks and other screenings.

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- We have a strict “two-deep” leadership policy, which requires that a youth is never alone with an adult leader during Scouting activities. Additionally, no youth is permitted to sleep in the tent of an adult other than his or her own parent/guardian. We also prohibit one-on-one contact between adults and youth members, including texting and communications on social media.
- We actively share and encourage the use of our 24/7 Scouts First Helpline to report any suspected abuse or inappropriate behavior. Further, we mandate that all allegations or suspicion of abuse are reported to authorities. In addition to removing the individual from Scouting, this means that if we receive a report regarding any suspicious activity or allegations of abuse, our next call is to law enforcement, whose investigation we support unequivocally.
- The BSA promotes a culture of safe Scouting and has a full-time Youth Protection Director, who is highly respected by child advocacy and youth protection experts.
- Additionally, our Volunteer Screening Database is at the forefront of youth protection procedures. While it has often been misunderstood and criticized, time and time again it has successfully prevented potential predators from re-joining our organization and gaining access to youth. That is precisely why we have been maintaining these records since the 1920s.

We are also consistent advocates to Congress for enhanced youth protection policies, initiatives and efforts. Specifically, BSA has recommended to Congress the following programs and ideas that independent experts agree will keep children safe, including:

- Establishing and funding a system where volunteers can register/be cleared through a common screening process for all states and organizations, with an affordable process for conducting background checks and periodically renewing the clearance to reduce the risk that potential abusers can gain access to children by moving across state lines or to other youth serving organizations;
- Enabling youth-serving organizations to share information about individuals who have been removed from their programs for alleged inappropriate conduct – even if the individuals have not been arrested or convicted – to keep potential abusers out of these organizations;
- Strengthening mandatory reporting laws; and,
- Requiring that sex abuse offenders serve full sentences.

The BSA also consults experts from law enforcement, child safety, psychology, and other relevant fields to ensure our policies are in line with, and in many cases, ahead of society’s knowledge of abuse and best practices for prevention. Additionally, the BSA hosts youth protection symposiums that bring together some of the brightest minds in the field to discuss best practices and prevention techniques to ensure our kids are kept safe.

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