



## **Best Risk Control Practices for Volunteer Youth Coaches**

Youth sport programs such as Little League, Pop Warner, and Babe Ruth are an exciting way to build civic pride, family togetherness, sportsmanship, and athletic and cognitive abilities. Many municipalities 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 town.

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 the 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.

**The Safety Director strongly encourages towns that directly operate or indirectly sponsor youth athletics, require all coaches take this course or an approved equivalent class as a condition to use 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 Safety Director encourages all public entities that have contact with minors to adopt a written program and annually meet with all supervisors and adult volunteer leaders of youth programs to review the provisions of the program. In addition, the following “best practices” should be implemented as quickly as possible:

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 the individual has previously resided, a credit check, a motor vehicle record check, and a personal and professional references. Negative or questionable results must be reviewed BEFORE the applicant be permitted to work with minors.
2. Prospective employees and volunteers must complete the training program developed by the organization BEFORE the applicant be permitted to work with minors.
3. Complete background checks and training must be conducted on an annual basis.

A comprehensive model is under development and will be posted on the MEL website. Notices will be widely distributed when it is finalized and available. Organizations that use adult employees or volunteers in their programs with minor children should start planning to implement all the provisions now.

This bulletin is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization’s policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.