
Maryland Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council

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April 1, 2024

RE: Annual Report on Youth Camps for 2023

Dear Secretary Laura Herrera Scott,

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 the Maryland Department of Health in developing regulations for youth camps.

This letter fulfills the Council's obligation, pursuant to Health-General § 14-404, Annotated Code of Maryland, to provide you with information for summer 2023 regarding the number of youth camps, facilities and campers in our state. Attached you will find the report supporting these requirements, entitled "2023 Annual Report Data."

Summer 2023 continued to be a rebound year for many camps. Camper days increased by 8% from summer 2022. In 2023, there were roughly 2,300,000 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. 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:

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- 1. Continue to ensure Maryland Department of Health has sufficient resources to issue written determinations regarding criminal history checks.** On April 24, 2023, Governor Wes Moore signed Senate Bill 708 requiring Maryland Department of Health, "issue a written determination to a youth camp as to whether the results of a criminal history check would be the basis for prohibiting the hiring of an applicant within a certain time period." Camps have a need to perform background checks leading into the camp season as well as during the camp season. The Council would like to ensure prompt results, as these are critical to maintain the safety of children and staff at Maryland camps.
 - 2. The Council strongly recommends that Maryland continue to fully fund the Youth Camp Program.** For 2023, there were over 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 toward 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 the health and safety of Maryland youth.

3. Ensure the Department has all 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.

4. 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. Ensuring the Department has adequate staff and resources available to assist camps with this process will ensure compliance and a safer camp community.

5. Educate the community about the licensing process. Many parents are not aware that Maryland requires youth camps to be licensed. In 2022-23, this council, along with representatives of the Maryland Department of Health's Office of Communications, drafted and adopted a statement to be widely used by camps to inform parents of the importance of licensure. The statement is, "When you choose a Maryland certified youth camp program, you are selecting a program expected to meet Maryland State Health and Safety requirements." Some other cost effective ideas to educate the public are to:

- a. Continue to provide a public database with a catalog of camps that are licensed.
- b. Use public service announcements.

The Council appreciates the work by Department and Program staff to help ensure that Maryland youth camps operate in a safe manner. Thank you again for your support for the health and safety of Maryland's Youth Camps and the children we serve.

Respectfully Submitted,



Allison Abbondante
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Council Chair

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