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## Maryland Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council

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National Camping Organization*

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April 20, 2023

RE: Annual Report on Youth Camps for 2022

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 2022 regarding the number of youth camps, facilities and campers in our state. Attached you will find the report supporting these requirements, entitled "2022 Annual Report Data."

Summer 2022 continued to be a rebound year for many camps. Camper days increased by 30% from summer 2021, but remain down 12% from 2019 levels. In 2022, there were roughly 2,200,000 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:

**1. Ensure the FBI Background Check Review process is available for summer 2023.** Camps received a letter from CJIS in fall 2021 indicating that FBI results for fingerprint background checks will stop being sent to Camps in the near future. The Council wrote the CJIS Leaders a letter in October 2021 – and have not received a reply – even after multiple requests. Currently, dissemination of the FBI Background Check typically occurs within 24 hours of fingerprint submission. The Council would like to ensure that the party responsible for reviewing records and providing feedback to Maryland camps completes the analysis within a similarly expeditious timeline. Camps have a need to perform background checks leading into the camp season as well as during the camp season. Prompt

results 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 2022, 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. Some 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 L. Abbondante*

Allison Abbondante  
Camp Owner/Manager – For Profit  
Council Co-Chair

*Virgil Boysaw Jr*

Virgil Boysaw Jr (Apr 26, 2023 11:00 EDT)

Virgil Boysaw, Jr.  
Local Health Department  
Council Co-Chair

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