
Maryland Youth Camp Safety Advisory Council

*Allison Abbondante
Camp Owner/Manager-For Profit*

*Melita Bell
Camp Owner/Manager-Non Profit*

*Neil Berlin
National Camping Organization
Council Co-Chair*

*Virgil Boysaw, Jr.
Local Health Department*

*Kelly Campbell
National Camping Organization
Council Co-Chair*

*Maggie Harris
Camp Owner/Manager*

*Dolores Hooban
Public Representative*

*Gabriel Houghton
Local Health Department*

*Dr. Jed Miller
MDH*

*Janet Rose
Camp Leader*

*Meena Suri
Camp Owner/Manager-ACA*

November 10, 2020

RE: Executive Order Guidelines for Maryland Youth Camps

Dear Secretary Neall,

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.

On behalf of families and programs that make up the Maryland camp community, we request that the current order for camps be modified and kept updated to reflect current COVID-19 knowledge. The revised order should align with comparable orders in the state such as youth sports, restaurants, large gatherings, and capacity limits in child care. The most recent order for youth camps was issued on June 12, 2020 – nearly 5 months ago, when our state was just emerging from Phase 1 of the Governor’s Roadmap to Recovery. The Council would like to ensure that camps in Maryland are prepared to safely “Open for Business,” consistent with other Maryland businesses.

There are two camps licensed by MDH that operate in December during the winter break. These camps should have an updated order to guide operations as soon as possible. Furthermore, summer camps begin their preparations for a safe summer camp season in the fall. More than ever, camps need significant lead time to effectively plan and make necessary infrastructure, staffing, programmatic, and training preparations and investments to ensure a safe summer in 2021.

Throughout the state, directives continue to be revised for other Maryland businesses. For example, there have been updates to allow youth sports, to remove pandemic-related capacity restrictions for child care, and to increase capacities for indoor dining and gatherings. Additionally, the current order excludes all youth from outside of Maryland from attending Maryland camps. The Council is not aware of any such residency-based restrictions for schools, universities, or other Maryland businesses.

We also believe that program-level staff in MDH, who are directly tasked with the safety of camps, should have the authority to grant approval to a specific camp program when the intent and purpose of an order can be met through alternate means. This flexibility would allow camps to solve the specific challenges of COVID-19 in their individual camp’s setting and circumstances, while

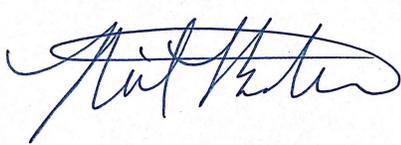
maintaining the safety of both campers and staff in a manner approved by MDH Program Staff.

Finally, the Council requests the opportunity to provide input on upcoming orders before their publication. As recognized in statute, we believe that the Council has collective wisdom to share in the process of keeping camps safe. Consistent with our mandate to “advise and assist the Department in developing regulations” for camps, we would appreciate the opportunity to play that role for future orders in advance of their publication.

We believe that camps play a critical role in the healthy development of youth. As mental health issues in our communities rise, and social isolation and the reliance on screens increase, we need camps more than ever to play their roles as partners in youth development and providers of child care for families.

The Council appreciates the work by Department and Program staff to help ensure that Maryland youth camps operate in a safe manner, especially in light of the current pandemic.

Respectfully Submitted,



Neil Berlin
National Camping Organization
Council Co-Chair



Kelly Campbell
National Camping Organization
Council Co-Chair

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