

Center for Youth Leadership

Why wait for someone else to make a difference?

Connecticut Legislature Select Committee on Children

Joint Informational Hearing on Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse January 24, 2012

*Emily Todd and Millie Cunningham
Center for Youth Leadership
Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk*

Hi everyone. My name is Emily Todd and this is Millie Cunningham. We are here today on behalf of the 226 members of the Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk. We have a special greeting for Representative Urban, with whom we have worked in the past, and Representative Wood, who is from our district.

We've been banging our heads against the wall for more than two years with the issues we're here to talk about - background checks of employees and volunteers at camps that are licensed by the Connecticut Department of Public Health; camp directors and their alternates as mandated reporters of child abuse; and workshops for all camp employees and volunteers on how to recognize and report suspected cases of child abuse.

As you may know, the licensing procedure used by the Department of Public Health does not require employees who manage camps, or employees or volunteers who interact with children and teen campers on a daily basis, to complete a national criminal background check.

We do not come to this topic lightly. We have been concerned about background checks and adult access to children and teens for some time. For example, we successfully lobbied the U.S. Postal Service to change its *Dear Santa Letter Program for Children*; we convinced the Norwalk School District to require background checks of adults who want to volunteer in the city's schools; and our ongoing outreach program with parents implores them to ask about background checks when researching camps for their children

That's why our outreach efforts to parents implore them to add one question to the list of questions they ask camp directors: *"Have all the employees and volunteers in the camp passed national criminal and child protective services background checks conducted by the camp?"*

We know this all sounds incredibly cynical, but it's a sign of the times. The vast majority of adults who work with children do so because they care about their well-being; they would never do anything to harm them. They do not hesitate to complete a background check and they are willing to wait to be hired until their prospective employer has received clearance of their background.

Camps also want to do right by children. But the camping industry needs some legislative oversight where several items are concerned: background checks for camp employees and volunteers; camp directors and their alternates as mandated reporters of child abuse; and workshops for all camp employees and volunteers on how to recognize and report suspected cases of child abuse.

Thanks for the opportunity to talk to you.

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*Center for Youth Leadership
Brien McMahon High School
300 Highland Avenue
Norwalk, Connecticut 06854
203.852.9488 and www.gocylnow.org*