

TO: All USA Swimming Member Coaches

FROM: Chuck Wielgus, Executive Director

DATE: April 11, 2010

SUBJECT: Child Protection Safeguards

In recent days our sport has been portrayed in a very bad light in the media. Sadly, I have also been portrayed as an insensitive, uncaring administrator and spokesperson for USA Swimming. There are pieces of the recent 20/20 interview that I'd like to have back, there were important things left out, and there were pieces of the report that were untrue.

As a father myself, it breaks my heart to know that there are children out there who have been taken advantage of by their coaches or others in positions of trust. It reminded me to sit down with my daughters and have a very frank but very important discussion about boundaries and appropriate behavior.

I also am extremely sorry if our organization has not done enough to provide the highest level of child protection safeguards and guidelines. We cannot shy away from this issue and we are going to need your help and participation. I want to encourage you to be proactive in addressing this topic with the young athletes, parents and other coaches with whom you work.

As a starting point, here are some very important factors to consider:

- **This is a societal issue.** The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that by the age of 18, one in four girls and one in six boys have been sexually molested. This amounts to approximately 39M victims in the U.S. alone.
- **Parents have the most important role.** Parents need to talk with their children about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable physical contact between the child and their coach and other adults. Parents must also stress to their children the importance of telling them anytime there is inappropriate or questionable behavior by their coach or other adults.
- **Sexual abuse must be reported to the police.** It is estimated that 30% of sexual abuse incidents go unreported. Children and parents need to understand

that it is not only okay to report these incidents, but that reporting is the only way that sexual predators can be brought to justice and prevented from harming others.

- **Child protection safeguards are both national and local.** USA Swimming provides a number of safeguards, but the most important application of safeguards must take place at the club level.

USA Swimming's current child protection safeguards are:

- **Safety Training** – all member coaches must be certified in CPR, First Aid and Safety Training for Swim Coaches.
- **Background Screening** – all member coaches must clear (prior to joining and then every two years) a criminal history screening that checks for charges involving sexual misconduct and illegal drug use, among other things.
- **Education** – by the second year of membership a coach must complete the “Foundations of Coaching” course.
- **Code of Conduct** – our rulebook outlines a thorough Code of Conduct that is applied to all members.
- **Reporting of Complaints** – our rulebook also details the procedures for reporting any Code of Conduct violations. Complaints involving sexual misconduct should be sent directly to my attention at USA Swimming HQ: cwielgus@usaswimming.org. (It is worth noting that anyone can file a complaint against a member ... non-members may file complaints).

In addition to these safeguards, we are continually studying what other youth-serving organizations are doing to determine if there are other safeguards that could enhance our child protection efforts. Two items that are under immediate consideration are:

- **Hot Line** – we are currently working to establish an anonymous reporting hotline so that victims who may be frightened can report any sexual abuse and have this information relayed to police.
- **Black List** – we are studying the feasibility of making available a list of names of individuals who have been banned for life from USA Swimming for sexual misconduct, in order to provide a resource for other youth-focused organizations.

Member clubs, as independent businesses, must also employ responsible hiring practices. At a minimum we recommend the following:

- **Raise Awareness** – by openly talking about the topic of sexual misconduct you will help young athletes, parents and coaches all become more comfortable with recognizing what is inappropriate behavior.
- **Conduct Thorough Reference Checks** – club leaders must take the time to thoroughly check the personal and professional background and previous experiences of coaches before they are hired. Do not simply rely on USA Swimming's criminal background screening; checking driving records and other police records are also important. Clubs should not only check references from prior employers, but should seek input from other parents whose children previously swam for the coach.
- **Stress the Importance of Reporting** – Sexual abuse is a criminal act and must be reported to the police. Reporting to USA Swimming is also important because we can then take action to expel the offending adult from our organization, and hopefully keep them from becoming involved with any other youth organization.

I hope this information is helpful to you as you address this very important issue with the young athletes, coaches and parents with whom you work.

Thank you very much for giving this your most serious consideration and attention.