

**Prepared Remarks from The Boy Scouts of America
Press Conference Call to Address Youth Protection**

April 24, 2019

2:00 PM ET

Participants:

- Michael Surbaugh, Chief Scout Executive for the Boy Scouts of America
- Dr. Janet Warren, Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences (PNBS) at the University of Virginia
- Erin Eisner, Chief Strategy Officer for the Boy Scouts of America

Prepared Remarks of Michael Surbaugh, Chief Scout Executive for the Boy Scouts of America

I am here today to correct inaccuracies and mischaracterizations about our organization and the efforts we have taken to protect youth, which has been and continues to be our absolute top priority.

First, I want to reiterate our steadfast support for victims of abuse.

- We are outraged that there have been times when individuals took advantage of our programs to abuse innocent children.
- We care deeply about all victims of child abuse and sincerely apologize to anyone who was harmed during their time in Scouting.
- We believe victims, we support them, and we pay for unlimited counseling by a provider of their choice and **we encourage them to come forward.**

In 2018, there were five known victims of sexual abuse in our Scouting programs at a time when there were 2.2 million youth in our programs. We steadfastly believe that one incident of abuse is one too many and we are continually improving all of our policies to prevent abuse.

Experts note that among the general US population, one in six men have experienced sexual abuse or assault at some point in their lives. This is an unacceptable public health problem that must be addressed, and we seek to be part of the solution along with all other youth-serving organizations.

Our volunteer screening database is a mechanism for keeping kids safe.

Let me share with you the facts:

- **ALL** instances of suspected abuse are reported to law enforcement. We do not keep any reports of suspected abuse secret or hidden from the proper authorities.
- Long before there were smart phones, email, the internet, criminal databases, or other modern methods available to identify or track predators, the BSA took a vital step to help protect children from bad people by creating what is known as the Ineligible Volunteer Files, or the IV Files. Its purpose was to ensure that anyone seen as unfit to be a leader – even those not charged or convicted of any crime, would be **removed and banned** forever from our program.
- The creation of those files was just the first step in the BSA's development of a comprehensive set of strategies designed to provide the best possible youth protection system. Today, record-keeping or databases such as ours are recommended by experts, including the CDC, as an important step in protecting children.
- While it has often been misunderstood and criticized, time and time again the IV Files, now called our Volunteer Screening Database, have successfully prevented potential predators from re-joining our organization and gaining access to youth. That is precisely why we have been maintaining these records since the 1920s.

- We have a very low threshold for removing someone from our scouting programs. Individuals are added to our Volunteer Screening Database based on suspected or known violations of our policies. They don't need to have been arrested or convicted of a crime to be added to the database. This is because our priority is to protect kids, first and foremost, above all else. It is an ongoing tool the BSA uses to keep youth safe from potential perpetrators.

I'd now like to introduce you to Dr. Janet Warren, a professor from the University of Virginia and a researcher and expert in sexual crimes against children. Dr. Warren has spent her career analyzing and profiling sexual offenders and serves as the University of Virginia liaison to the FBI Behavioral Sciences Unit. The BSA engaged Dr. Warren in 2011 to review the files maintained in our Volunteer Screening Database and analyze ways that the BSA could further improve its youth protection efforts. The BSA publicly released Dr. Warren's first report in 2012. In our efforts to continually be on the forefront of youth protection, the BSA asked Dr. Warren to continue her work and evaluation of our database and barriers to abuse. She is in the final stages of that report. Dr. Warren has reached a number of conclusions as the work has progressed and we've asked her to be here today to speak to her work with us.

Prepared Remarks of Dr. Janet Warren, Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences (PNBS) at the University of Virginia

- Good afternoon. I'd like to speak about the body of work I have done for the BSA since my initial report in 2012 and provide context to some of the figures presented in the media. I reviewed **full, complete and unredacted files** from the BSA that have been commonly referred to as the confidential files, perversion files or, as the BSA now refers to them, the Volunteer Screening Database. My team of researchers analyzed the data to see what attributes, patterns or profiles could be gleaned from the incidents. We made several key observations and we are in the process of finalizing our work.
- I'd like to share with you some of the most salient findings today. I anticipate being able to present the work in a comprehensive manner sometime this summer.
- First, one of the key observations we made is that **the data demonstrated that the Scouting program is safe and the BSA's use of a database to prevent unsuitable adults from accessing children was cutting edge and it worked.** Even through the years when there were no computers, the BSA's efforts were effective in keeping unsuitable volunteers from gaining access to youth in the Scouting program.
- **The rate of incidence of reported abuse in BSA programs was far less than the rate of incidence in society as a whole. And the data shows that the BSA's youth protection efforts since the 1980's have been highly effective in preventing abuse.**
- **Second, there is no evidence of a coverup by the Boy Scouts of America.**
- 100% of all cases reported over the last 50 years were reported to law enforcement.
- Additionally, as experts in this area agree, there is no profile of an offender that can be discerned from the data. The research underscores the importance of moving beyond simplistic and overly inclusive explanations of child sexual abuse.
- Finally, the research underscores the need for a national database to track persons unsuitable to work with youth, similar to the one the BSA has used for almost 100 years. Criminal records checks and sexual offender registries based upon criminal convictions are inadequate to protect against offenders who have never been arrested or convicted.

Prepared Remarks of Erin Eisner, Chief Strategy Officer for the Boy Scouts of America

- My name is Erin Eisner, and I'm the BSA's Chief Strategy Officer for Culture and People. I am also a mom of two Scouts. My son joined as a Cub Scout, and my daughter and I are thrilled that she is now a member of Scouts BSA.
- I'd like to pick up where Dr. Warren left off to discuss what we are doing to help keep kids safe, both inside and outside of Scouting. While our database has served to keep millions of children safe in our Scouting programs, we have learned a lot over the years, and we want to share that with other youth servicing organizations. We know that our policies and barriers to abuse can help prevent child sex abuse throughout our communities and across all organizations.
- Experts agree that one of the most effective ways to prevent predators from having access to children is to track data on those individuals who have violated youth protection policies or have even been suspected of violating those policies. Specifically, the Center for Disease Control looked at the issue of keeping kids safe in youth serving organizations in 2007 and noted that databases such as the one BSA uses are a recognized method of protecting children from predators. As you've heard today, the BSA has employed this practice since virtually the inception of our organization.
- We are eager to share the information contained in our database with other youth serving organizations. **That is why we've advocated for and will continue to push for the creation of a national database to serve as a clearing house for all youth serving organizations. Our vision, and one shared by others working hard in this space to protect youth, is that all youth serving organizations would be required to track and document those adults who have harmed children or have been suspected of harming children and report this information into a national registry.** Similar to the National Sex Offender Public Website maintained by the Department of Justice, our goal is the creation of a registry for those who seek to work with children. This would reduce the risk that potential abusers could gain access to children by moving or going to another youth-serving organization after being removed. We are working with other groups and organizations such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the CDC to see how we can assist in this critical development. We've also called on Congress to partner in these efforts and to develop legislative mechanisms to facilitate this national database into a reality.
- We are optimistic about these efforts because we know they will make a difference – we have seen firsthand the impact they've had on our own organization's steps to protect children.
- **Children in our Scouting programs are safe today.** Millions of children participate in and benefit from the character building and leadership activities in our programs – without incident. Parents can be confident in our program today and be proud of our efforts to protect children while they learn, have fun and experience Scouting as it was intended. I am confident in this.
- I am an Executive with the BSA but **first and foremost, I am a mother.** And my heart breaks for any child that has experienced the tragedy and trauma of abuse. If I felt, for a second, that Scouting was unsafe, I would not be associated with nor advocate for the BSA. To the contrary, I am confident in our program and confident in our efforts to protect children. My own daughter and son are both members of Scouts BSA and participate in Scouting locally in a dynamic and safe troop here in Dallas. I have no reservations about their participation and am excited to see more and more children, across the country, including record numbers of young women, be introduced to the Scouting program.

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