

CIAC Officials Association

Sub Committee Meeting Summary - Background Checks

November 19, 2008

Members Present: Ralph Baldelli, Bruce Brenia, Ray Faustich, Patricia Javorski, Hank Kortikoski, Dave Leete, Joe Delbouno, Ron Denuzzo, Joe Perry, and Joe Tonelli, CIAC. Joe Castagnola, Superintendent of Schools, New Fairfield Public Schools has also agreed to serve on this committee along with Jay Kelleher, an executive with Sysco Corp. and a member of the leadership of the Hartford Football Board.

It is important to note that four of the officials on the committee work in the law enforcement or legal field on the local and state level. Their expertise and extensive background in this area will be invaluable to the committee.

Joe provided some background on the reasons this committee was formed and the need to establish a definitive action plan relative to background checks. Several recent incidents, involving CT officials, who are on the sex offenders lists, have raised the concerns of schools, legislators, and the general public regarding this issue. As a result, the CIAC Officials' Association Advisory Board, with all sports represented, was unanimously in favor of taking a proactive approach and directed Joe Tonelli to form a committee to discuss the feasibility of developing a practical plan FOR BOARDS TO CONSIDER RELATIVE TO IMPLEMENTING SOME LEVEL OF BACKGROUND SCREENING for officials in CT.

The Advisory board BELIEVES that it is advisable to propose a plan initiated from our organization, rather than sit back and wait for the legislators to enact an unfunded mandate. This is the charge of our committee.

The goal is to provide a progress report to the CIAC Board of Control at their APRIL and MAY meetings and update the CIAC Officials' Association Advisory Board WHEN THEY MEET IN May. Additionally, the CIAC lobbyist Marshall Collins will alert us if the Senate or the House initiates any legislation regarding background checks for officials.

The committee discussed some initial steps FOR BOARDS TO CONSIDER and some practical ways that local boards can begin to address this issue. These are some of the recommendations for consideration:

- All boards should CONSIDER HAVING an application process for new members and PERHAPS a similar questionnaire for current members, IF THEY SO CHOOSE. To assist all boards, it was suggested

that a standard application be developed with the help of CIAC FOR BOARDS TO CONSIDER. To aid in this process, boards that already have an application should email an electronic copy to jtonelli@casciac.org. We don't want to re-event the wheel, but we do want to develop a few standard questions FOR BOARDS TO CONSIDER that COULD serve as an initial step in the screening process, and a statement for the applicant to sign that attests to the veracity of the information.

- All boards MIGHT consider making it a requirement for members to immediately inform the board leadership if they have been arrested or charged with an indictable criminal charge. IF A BOARD DECIDED TO IMPLIMENT SUCH A POLICY, IT SHOULD BE STATED THAT failure to notify the chapter COULD be a basis for A BOARD TO TAKE DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST THE MEMBER.

- Some SUGGESTED questions that BOARDS MAY CONSIDER INCLUDING on applications

1. Have you ever been convicted of a felony?

If yes please explain in detail.

2. Have you ever been convicted of a crime against a minor or any sexual or violent offense?

If yes, please explain in detail.

3. Are you on the sex offenders list?

(Legal COUNSEL WOULD BE ADVISABLE before finalizing the QUESTION(S) AND DECIDING TO INCLUDE THEM ON YOUR APPLICATION)

- All boards should consider checking their members through the sex offender's registry. There is no cost, if you conduct the search of the records yourself. The link to the sex offenders registry is <http://www.ct.gov/dps/cwp/view.asp?a=2157&q=294474>

(THIS IS A PUBLIC REGISTRY AND AVAlABLE TO ALL CITIZENS)

- All boards should consider requiring new candidates to have a background check or at least running the names through the sex offender registry.

It was noted that decisions had to be made on the following questions;

1. Who would be screened?

2. How would this be done?

3. Who would pay for it?

4. What type of offenses would we screen for?
5. Who would have access to the reports?
6. What type of offenses would prevent an official from officiating, or continuing to officiate?
7. What type of appeal process would be established, and who would hear the appeal?
8. What company should we use to perform the background checks?

Another very important consideration is what steps can be taken to insure the confidentiality of the information since we would want to protect the reputation of the official.

The committee spent considerable time discussing the information obtained by Joe T that was sent in advance regarding background checks. In addition, committee member Ron DeNuzzo distributed the protocol that is followed for screening all personnel associated with a local league in a particular town. Ron is a former police officer and he is currently an investigator with the States Attorneys office.

The NFHS Survey, which provided valuable information, indicates that the number of states conducting background checks is increasing. Joe will request the names of the states that already have a system in place that may serve us well.

Joe mentioned that he has been researching a company in Oregon that employs former law enforcement personnel and conducts a nation-wide data search for about \$5.00 per or less per official. The committee suggested that we obtain samples of the info they can obtain through their search. The Oregon Soccer Association and the Oregon State High School Association uses their service and they are very pleased with the company. This could prove to be a feasible option for us. Since the level of scrutiny that would be needed for screening officials, who seldom if ever have 1 on 1 unsupervised contact with the athletes, may not require the state police check that teachers and coaches must undergo, including finger printing. The cost of the state police check is \$24.00 each.

The last segment of the meeting was devoted to summarizing our thoughts and stipulating to some concepts and beliefs shared by the members of the committee.

By consensus, the committee agreed on the following:

1. It is prudent to be proactive and take the lead relative to background screening, rather than be required to do this by law, or as a result of a serious incident.
2. A standard application that can be edited to meet the needs of all sports and organizations COULD be helpful TO LOCAL BOARDS.
3. It is wise for boards to CONSIDER utilizing the sex offender registry since it can be done at no cost AND IT IS PUBLIC INFORMATION. This is especially important for new applicants.
4. Liability insurance for local boards is a must in order to be able to protect the board against any claim that may result.

As an aside, Joe mentioned a special arrangement that CIAC has with NFHS Officials' Association at a cost of only \$12 per official. You get 2 million dollars of liability coverage, excess medical/accident insurance for 52 weeks for all sports you officiate, regardless if it is a high school game, rec league, AAU and any other amateur contest, plus the many benefits of being a member of the NFHS Officials association. This arrangement was made by CIAC at the request of several boards, and currently there are more than 1,000 Connecticut Officials taking advantage of this excellent opportunity. The company (Bollinger) that provides the insurance also insures CIAC, NFHS and many other state associations. There are more than 110,000 officials in the NFHS Officials' Association.

The exceptional rate of \$12 is only available through CIAC, because the NFHS expects CIAC to provide all the data on the officials which we can easily do through our data base. There is absolutely no extra work for the local boards.