



## Camp Safety Public Policy Position

### Position

The American Camp Association (ACA) actively promotes and supports camp safety. We provide camps and their leaders with well-tested programs and services that advance a continuous improvement process that goes well beyond fundamental protection. For assurance of fundamental protection, ACA believes state governments are better able than the federal government to determine levels of care for organized camp operations. Furthermore, we believe states should collaborate with non-governmental national organizations, such as ACA, in order to further advance a higher level of care and wellbeing during the camp experience.

### Background

In 2003, an estimated more than 10 million children and youth benefited from a camp experience at the more than 12,000 camps nationwide. The diversity of types of camps continues to increase, with up to 15 percent dedicated to meeting the special needs of campers with physical, emotional, or mental challenges. In addition, many of today's camps offer camp experiences year-round. Verifying best practices in the extensive range of camps requires a system that is broadly applicable and continually updated. Currently, states vary significantly in their oversight of camp operations. In many states, camps fall under the jurisdiction of the state health department; in others, social or human services departments provide licensing or permit rules. Today, courts of law recognize ACA-accreditation requirements as the standard of care for camps. In the last ten years, we have seen more states working with ACA's camp standards to complement and strengthen the camp profession. At the same time, ACA has advanced its overall professional development efforts and exploration of quality and best practice indicators for the camp profession.

### Rationale

Systems to assure care and well-being through regulation are most effective when linked to ongoing professional development programs that are continuously updated to respond to new outcome-based accountability derived from current, industry-specific, and relevant research. As the extensive range of camps emerge within the camp industry, states are best equipped to respond to the geographic, environmental, cultural, recreational, and education diversity found across the country. A number of successful collaborations already exist:

- In many states, including California, Colorado, Indiana, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Texas, state government has looked to the American Camp Association and our members to serve as expert advisors in the development and/or redevelopment of state regulations impacting camps.
- In Broward County, Florida, ACA has been asked to participate on the committee that will develop county regulations for day camps.
- The State of Michigan accepts ACA accreditation as meeting part of its licensing requirements for camps.

When states collaborate with non-governmental national organizations, such as ACA, a higher level of care and well-being is advanced - well-being that goes beyond fundamental protection and is directly related to best practice. Therefore, training and education that advance a continuous improvement process is critical. ACA offers comprehensive camp management resources and training that serve to:

- Manage risk through the development of operational systems that enhance physical and emotional safety.
- Promote positive, quality development through child-adult relationships, and intentional programming.

An ongoing comprehensive improvement process that captures quality and best practice indicators must be integrated in order to truly meet the needs of the camper, camp families, the camp professional, and the camp experience. It is in the national interest to ensure camp participants are placed in safe, quality environments.

### Call to Action

The American Camp Association believes that camp safety is further enhanced through self-regulation supported by education, research, and striving toward best practices. The ACA also believes that camp safety is not an issue that is best handled by federal regulation. Instead, if state governments play the assurance role and determine levels of care for organized camp operations, ACA urges collaboration with non-governmental national organizations. *(approved 2/24/2004)*