

Statement from the Safe Play Advisory Group in response to ADM 24-29, authored by Hal Terrie (NH)

The Safe Play Advisory Group (SPAG) formally opposes ADM 24-29 and refutes the argument presented by the author in his statement of rationale.

From the first complaint in March 2022 to June 2024, 89% of safe play complaints reported to US Chess have occurred at the state or local levels. Therefore, the author's assertion that training through the U.S. Center for SafeSport (SafeSport) is only beneficial at national events is patently false. Furthermore, while the author believes the SafeSport training requirement is an overreaction to an isolated national incident, the data simply does not bear this out.

The author also states, "There is no great crisis suddenly on the scene which requires such a dramatic change in TD certification rules." It is irresponsible to suggest that any organization should wait for a crisis to occur before acting. It is far better to be proactive and provide tools to recognize and manage Safe Play violations, rather than to be reactive and unprepared when "a great crisis" does occur. Consequently, safe play training requirements were planned as part of the broader safe play program — the groundwork of which was put in place in 2019 — and have been long overdue.

Implementing a safe play training requirement for individuals seeking tournament director certification is the **bare minimum**¹ that US Chess can and should be doing to keep our participants safe. It is telling that such a limited installation of a player safety measure should bring about any backlash at all.

It is already an expected norm for youth sports organizations to require a version of standardized training for their adult volunteers and staff. Prior to 2023, US Chess, with a membership that is 65% scholastic, had absolutely no requirement for certified volunteers to work with children. This alone represents an astonishing failure to acknowledge the organization's status within the realm of competitive youth sports — a role that includes and necessitates keeping children safe during any US Chess sanctioned events.

The author also suggests that the training is "entirely irrelevant to the actual skills required of TDs." It should be noted, first and foremost, that the skills required to run a tournament **include** the knowledge and training to keep participants safe in difficult circumstances. Participants are entitled to parity when entering a tournament, which includes being treated as an equal by other participants, no matter their age, gender, race, religion, rating, or orientation. It is the TD's responsibility to recognize, encourage, and ensure fairness for participants, at the board and beyond.

More specifically, however, SafeSport training provides information and resources that can help tournament directors face and navigate a variety of difficult situations during their events. Safe Play is not just a sexual harassment issue, as the ADM author seems to suggest. It also

¹ For example, one SPAG member notes that their local chess club has stricter requirements to work with 12 children in any capacity — including running an unrated tournament — than US Chess requires of certified directors who have access to over 100,000 players.

encompasses a variety of behaviors that could impact a chess tournament, including (but not limited to):

- Bullying
- Non-sexual harassment
- Cyber-bullying
- Emotional misconduct

...all of which are covered in the core SafeSport training module.

It is vital to foster an environment of trust so people feel safe reporting incidents to tournament directors. Creating safe spaces gives participants the security that if they report, they will be taken seriously. The universally applicable standards of SafeSport training, and the **guarantee** that any TD has passed the training, are a first step towards fostering this trusting context. It is at least possible that TDs would hear about more incidents if there was more belief that TDs were trained to handle such reports. Furthermore, the fact that the author has only noticed one incident that may fall under the safe play policy in 40 years also suggests that he might benefit from SafeSport training to help him recognize and identify potential incidents.

In sum: SafeSport training is neither “window dressing” nor an overreaction. It is, in fact, a long overdue and much-needed measure that has begun to point US Chess in the proper direction (namely, that of player safety, which begins with training for members who receive official certifications as either a director or coach). US Chess has proffered official certifications to members who work directly with children for decades without any requirement beyond signing a piece of paper. We are fortunate that we have not encountered more situations with poor outcomes. If this ADM passes, we remain mired in an era of uninformed complacency, which does not mitigate our responsibilities, but will hamper our ability to handle incidents properly and sensitively.

It is well past time to meet the needs of our most vulnerable members. US Chess must continue to do its best to protect all chess players by offering them a safe environment to enjoy the game, which is implicit in every aspect of our mission statement. Rejecting the motion and maintaining the current SafeSport training requirement is the least we can do to achieve that purpose.

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