



Radnor Lawyers Advise Schools on New Volunteer Background Check Law

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Susan Guerette was quoted on *Mainline Media News* on July 27, 2015. The article “High Court Suspends Houston’s Equal Rights Law” discussed how a new and recently updated state law passed in the wake of the Jerry Sandusky child sex abuse scandal that requires background checks on certain volunteers has both private schools and school districts seeking guidance.

“We’re seeing a lot of questions from schools, about which volunteers” need a clearance, Susan said.

For example, under the changes recently passed by the state Legislature clarifying the earlier law, a parent who stops in and reads to their child’s class would not need a clearance, nor would someone just visiting the building.

“It’s not every person who steps in the school needs these,” she said.

Rather, it is “regular and repeated contact that’s integral,” said Susan. Also, the volunteers who need clearances have to be responsible for “care, supervision, guidance, control and routine interaction,” with children.

“From a school’s perspective, they’re trying to look at different buckets of volunteers,” said Susan. “They don’t want to dissuade people from volunteering.” But parents who routinely volunteer should be.

“It’s a tough balance for the Legislature,” said Susan. “We don’t want another Penn State situation.”

Guerette is also talking to schools about a change in reporting requirements that is also a product of the Sandusky case. Staff members suspecting child abuse must now report it to the authorities, not just to their superiors at the schools. Before “we had people telling the school and not telling the authorities,” she said. The law now “gives them an independent duty to report.”

“We encourage anyone suspecting child abuse to call Childline,” she said. ChildLine is part of the Department of Public Welfare: 1-800-932-0313.

In the wake of school shootings, most schools have beefed up security but most do not have armed security guards, said Susan. But they do lock their facilities and monitor who comes in and out

security guards, said Susan. But they do lock their facilities and monitor who comes in and out. Schools in Delaware County have emergency buttons to automatically call 911.

In April, when a former employee came into Barrack Hebrew Academy and stabbed a current employee, school officials deployed the panic button and locked down the school.

“I do think that was the right thing to do,” said Susan. Schools “do have to take every incident seriously.” Schools also have practice drills with students so they know what to do if a situation were to arise. “Practicing lock down drills is a little scary for the kids but you do want them to know what to do. There have been so many school shootings. It’s really an issue and when we have kids all together, we have to make sure we’re protecting them.”

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