

UW System: Bolsters youth protection on campuses

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MADISON, Wis.—University of Wisconsin System President Tommy Thompson today announced a policy requiring all System universities to enhance their safety standards and protocols for protection of minors participating in university-sponsored events. He also announced the launch of a new youth activity database to document registration and compliance of youth activities.

“Thousands of minors, especially during the summer, visit our universities through our many programs and activities,” said Thompson. “We have an obligation to provide the utmost of protection and care when they are here. These additional requirements will add another layer of safety protocols and resources for youth protection.”

“UW System continues to strengthen its protection of minors participating in youth activities by supporting our precollege liaisons, program directors, and youth program coordinators to establish and promote policies, trainings, and best practices,” said Regent President Edmund Manydeeds III.

The new UW System policy establishes minimum protection standards for minors engaged in covered youth programs that each university must follow, such as conducting criminal background checks on those adults authorized to interact with youth as well as additional training requirements. All universities will update their policies and practices to adhere to these minimum standards by December 31, 2022.

The recently launched Youth Activity Registration System (YARS) is an online database that UW System campus directors of compliance, precollege liaisons, and program directors will use for program registration as well as documenting

compliance requirements and safety interactions of youth activities. It will increase the level of oversight of youth activities at the campus level by tracking the names and contact information of all participants and adults involved in the activities and verifying compliance with background checks and training requirements.

In October 2020, Thompson established a UW System compliance office that now reports directly to the UW System President and the Board of Regents and hired a director of youth protection and compliance whose professional expertise and efforts have assisted institutions in establishing and enforcing safety protocols, including return-to-campus guidelines last summer for youth programs.

UW System institutions offer hundreds of academic and recreational programs and activities for youth ages 5-18 years old.