

14 October 2019

To the Academic Staff Assembly,

We wish to share our experiences and concerns with the origins, roll out, implementation, and impacts of the new Youth Protection Policies at UW-Madison. We have had the opportunity to share our concerns with the Academic Staff Executive Committee on September 5 and September 19.

The information session on February 6, 2019, for the Precollege/Youth Programming overwhelmingly emphasized the institutional risk posed by programs that welcome youth to the UW campus. Missing, from our perspective, was an affirmation of the vital UW mission of bringing youth to campus and a necessary discussion of how to balance those competing priorities.

Wisconsin youth are co-owners and co-funders of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They have a right to be here. Youth presence on campus ensures our UW legacy for future generations of scholars and stakeholders.

Youth protection policies, especially those that concentrate mostly on reducing the university's exposure to tort proceedings, rather than on reducing demonstrated risk to youth, also need to be assessed on the extent to which such policies impede access of youth to campus.

Our leading concern is that the new policies do not take into account the great diversity of programs and venues on our campus that serve minors. A preschool day camp, a one-day conference for middle-schoolers, and a residential summer camp for high school students are all examples of programs that take custodial care of minors. However, the policy does not clearly distinguish between youth protection practices that would best serve these different programs.

Policies that increase costs in program budget or in staff time, and that result in increased fees or in decreased offerings, are already directly impacting programming that can be offered at UW-Madison. Existing programs are struggling under the fiscal, administrative, and regulatory burden placed on program staff, and the list of cancelled or suspended programs is growing.

We support the call by ASEC and Jeff Russell, dean of Continuing Studies, to convene a committee to revise the policy. We seek revisions to the policy that will incorporate the flexibilities affirmed orally but not yet in writing. We seek revisions so the policy will be tailored to the range of best practices for custodial overnight programs, for custodial day programs, and for non-custodial day programs. We seek youth protection policies commensurate with the range of risks and without unduly impeding youth access to their public land-grant university.

UW-Madison Science Alliance