



Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corp: Criminal Background Studies

Proposal

This proposal gives the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) authority to conduct background studies on select members of the Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corp. Public and private-sector employers have long used background checks to verify the suitability of employees for working with vulnerable groups or sensitive information. Similar verification safeguards are appropriate for volunteer responders, given the important and increasing role they play in serving our citizens during disasters.

Background

The Minnesota Behavioral Health Team and Mobile Medical Team are new specialty health care volunteer teams within the Minnesota Responds Medical Reserve Corps. The Minnesota Behavioral Health Team is a statewide unit coordinated by MDH, and the Mobile Medical Teams are being developed through our regional health care system preparedness programs. These specialty health care teams are deployed when local resources are overwhelmed. They support and provide critical medical care and behavioral health services to disaster-affected Minnesota communities. These teams also supervise lesser-trained volunteers who might be needed to assist.

Volunteers in a disaster work with adults and children in a vulnerable situation. Furthermore, in

an emergency vulnerable adults and children may be treated in areas not readily observable by others to afford them some privacy as they seek physical or behavioral health care. In deploying these volunteers, MDH must take proactive and reasonable steps to minimize the potential for abuse.

MDH provides liability protection for individuals when they volunteer to the state or county. Therefore, the ability to screen and exclude volunteers with certain criminal convictions from having access to vulnerable Minnesotans is necessary to protect the public.

Rationale

Volunteers provide significant value and cost savings to MDH, local health departments, and the communities they serve. This proposal helps support the continued need, value, and necessity to screen members of the Minnesota Mobile Medical and Behavioral Health teams.

Conducting background studies on disaster volunteers is recommended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services agencies that provide federal emergency preparedness funding to states. The list of agencies making this recommendation includes the Office of the Surgeon General, Division of the Civilian Volunteer Medical Reserve Corps; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

For More Information:

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