Guidelines for Requiring or Permitting a 1:1 Volunteer

General Considerations

From time to time, Special Olympics PA (SOPA) may require that athletes be accompanied by a 1:1 volunteer in order to participate in certain activities. Additionally, an individual or a member of their circle of care (family members, coaches, etc.) may request 1:1 volunteer support. As a private, volunteer-driven non-profit corporation, SOPA strives to provide safe, inclusive, and empowering experiences for all participants. To this end, SOPA balances inclusion and the individual needs of participants with organizational sustainability. This approach is consistent with SOPA's goals of ensuring equitable access and a positive environment, not only for individual athletes but also for their teammates and other delegation members. Independence and social inclusion are important considerations so that participating athletes do not feel excluded, embarrassed, or over-managed.

The following are examples of the general factors SOPA considers when assessing whether an athlete needs, or should be permitted to have, 1:1 volunteer support for an activity. No single factor is determinative. Instead, because every athlete and activity is unique, the ultimate decision to require (or permit) a 1:1 volunteer is based on a comprehensive assessment of many factors that are specific to the situation at-hand, including the needs of an individual athlete, the components of a particular activity, the potential risks involved in allowing a 1:1 volunteer, the availability of qualified Class A volunteers to serve as a 1:1, alternative accommodations that may be made in lieu of a 1:1, and overall program capacity.

Factors including, but not limited to, the following will be considered as part of SOPA's assessment:

1. **Behavioral or Safety Concerns**:
    - Criminal History: Athletes with criminal histories, especially those involving violence or sexual abuse, may require 1:1 supervision to mitigate risks and ensure safety.
    - Behavioral Issues: Athletes exhibiting disruptive or challenging behaviors that could endanger themselves or others may benefit from individualized attention and support.

2. **Medical Needs**:
    - Physical Needs and Support Requirements: Athletes with significant physical

limitations may require assistance with activities of daily living or medical interventions.
- Medical Conditions: Athletes with chronic health conditions or acute illnesses may need constant monitoring or specialized care.

3. **Emotional Support**:
   - Vulnerability: Athletes who are emotionally vulnerable or at risk of self-harm may benefit from the presence of a trusted individual.
   - Social Isolation: Athletes who struggle with social interactions or isolation may find comfort and support in a 1:1 relationship.

The goal is to ensure the safety, well-being, and full participation of **all** athletes—including the individual for whom the request or potential need for 1:1 support is being assessed. The presence of a 1:1 volunteer should not detract from the positive competition experience or team camaraderie of other participants, nor should it place an undue burden on other delegation members. Under all circumstances, when an athlete is in the act of competing in a sports event, a 1:1 is prohibited from physically assisting that athlete with their performance.

Decisions about requiring/permitting a 1:1 will be made on a case-by-case basis, and the final determination on requiring or allowing a 1:1 volunteer rests with the President of SOPA.

Requesting a 1:1 Volunteer

As noted, athletes or their circle of care may request permission for the athlete to have 1:1 volunteer support during an activity. Such requests can be submitted to the appropriate Regional Sport Director. In reviewing requests, SOPA will assess the factors described above, as well as any additional considerations that are specific to the individual athlete and the activity at-issue.

Specific considerations should be discussed well in advance of the anticipated need with the appropriate Regional Sports Director in order to allow adequate time for review of the request. Clinical or professional justification (such as a letter from a doctor or a behavioral specialist) may be required to support a request for 1:1 volunteer support. Regional staff will work in consultation with other staff and, as appropriate, with other professionals —such as teachers, coaches, medical professionals, or behavioral health specialists—to evaluate requests and determine the appropriate course of action.

After working with all appropriate staff, if the requestor is unable to reach a resolution they

deem satisfactory, the matter may be appealed to the President of SOPA for a final decision as to whether an individual athlete will be permitted to have 1:1 volunteer support for a particular activity.

Identifying 1:1 Volunteers

The responsibility for identifying and providing the 1:1 volunteer rests with the family or circle of care for the individual athlete. SOPA will review the volunteer proposed in the context of the specific situation and reserves the right to refuse the volunteer if deemed inappropriate. If requested, and only when able, SOPA will assist in identifying an appropriate volunteer to serve as the 1:1.

If a participating athlete with behavioral or safety concerns is from a group home or other type of facility, SOPA may require that the group home or facility provide the 1:1 volunteer chaperone.

All 1:1 chaperones, regardless of situation and even if related to the athlete, must be registered as Class A Volunteers, complete training required of Class A volunteers, and be screened in compliance with the Special Olympics US Volunteer Screening Policy. SOPA also reserves the right to require expenses for the 1:1, such as hotel room costs, be covered by the requestor.

Questions

Any questions about this document should be submitted to SOPA's Chief Operating Officer.