



## HOUSING POLICY

### **Safety Statement**

Special Olympics is an athlete-centered movement that welcomes all athletes with intellectual disabilities regardless of physical ability to participate in sports training and competition. Special Olympics is inclusive for all persons with intellectual disabilities over the age of eight and offers a Young Athletes program for individuals with intellectual disabilities under the age of eight.

Special Olympics Pennsylvania (SOPA) is committed to providing appropriate and safe environments for its athletes, volunteers, and employees. The health and safety of the athletes we serve is the highest priority for SOPA. Participants should feel that every Special Olympics event is a safe and positive experience and should not be fearful of other athletes, coaches or volunteers.

Arranging housing for overnight events involves the consideration of a variety of factors, including the varying abilities, ages, maturity, and behaviors of athletes, the availability of housing and the costs associated with overnight accommodations. Risk management principles apply to all aspects of SOPA activities. Although it is not possible to avoid all risks associated with sports training, competition, travel, and other SOPA activities, we must always consider ways to avoid or minimize identifiable risks when practical, including, in housing athletes during overnight events.

SOPA has adopted the following Housing Policy to apply to the housing of SOPA athletes and Unified Partners traveling to overnight events. This Housing Policy (or summary of key elements) will be distributed to and acknowledged by all athletes/Unified Partners and/or their parents or legal guardians as part of the athlete application for participation (commonly called the "athlete medical") at least once every three years. In addition, the latest version of this Policy (or summary of key elements) will be maintained on the SOPA website at [www.specialolympicspa.org](http://www.specialolympicspa.org).

There may be situations, such as World/National Games and competitions sponsored by other state or national Special Olympics Programs, where SOPA does not arrange for the overnight accommodations. In such situations, SOPA will apply the requirements of this Policy to the fullest extent possible given the arrangements for overnight accommodations established by the

sponsor for that event. SOPA will make reasonable attempts to notify all athletes/Unified Partners scheduled to participate in the overnight event if any requirement of this Policy cannot be implemented during such event.

This Policy is not intended to, and cannot foresee all possible situations that might arise when attempting to arrange for the housing of athletes, Unified Partners, volunteers, and other chaperones at overnight events sponsored by SOPA or by other state or national Special Olympics Programs. In the event a situation arises that is not specifically provided for in this Policy, a resolution of that situation in keeping with the spirit and other provisions of this Policy will be implemented after appropriate review and approval by SOPA's President and CEO.

### **Policy for Housing During Overnight Travel**

At times, it may be necessary for athletes/Unified Partners who participate in certain Special Olympics events to travel and stay overnight in housing accommodations (such as hotel/motel/dorm) arranged by Special Olympics. This Policy applies to any overnight accommodations arranged by SOPA, either by the state office or by local Programs if travelling for a local invitational or other event not sponsored by the state office.

The Head of Delegation (HOD) for each SOPA local program is responsible for implementing this Housing Policy at events and ensuring that the volunteers and chaperones are familiar with and carrying out the Policy. This includes pre-event housing assignments as well as managing this policy for late activation of athletes, Unified Partners or volunteers.

The following specific rules will be followed:

- 1) Requirements prior to attending an overnight event:
  - a) All athletes/Unified Partners must complete and sign a "Travel Information" form (if there are any changes from information provided on the Application for Participation form currently on file). This "Travel Information" form will be provided and collected by each local Program HOD prior to travel.
  - b) The local SOPA program will make reasonable attempts to inform each adult athlete, each Unified Partner, and the parents or guardian of each minor athlete and each adult athlete unable to consent about the name and age of his or her roommate(s) during the overnight event and the names of the chaperones attending.
  - c) All athletes/Unified Partners must acknowledge that they have received and will abide by SOPA's Code of Conduct.
  - d) All athletes/Unified Partners, or in the case of minor athletes/Unified Partners and adult athletes unable to consent their parent and/or guardian, must have acknowledged that a copy of SOPA's Athlete Housing Policy has been made available to them.

Note: The requirements of 1 (c) and 1 (d) will be met by the athlete's three-year "Application for Participation" form.

2) Coaches, Volunteers, and Chaperones.

- a) All coaches, volunteers, or other chaperones staying overnight in the same facility with SOPA athletes MUST have an up-to-date Class A Volunteer Form (updated every three years) on file with the SOPA local program office, regardless of whether or not they are staying in a room with an athlete.
- b) A chaperone/athlete ratio of at least one properly registered and screened chaperone to every four athletes must be maintained during overnight events. Proper supervision can be maintained without having a chaperone present in the room at all times.

3) Housing Requirements.

- a) The SOPA local Program's Head of Delegation and/or SOPA state office staff with responsibilities for specific events have the discretion to decide whether an athlete is eligible to participate in overnight events.
- b) Unified Partners will not be assigned to rooms with SOPA athletes.
- c) Athletes, Unified Partners, and volunteers may not share a room with someone of the opposite sex, except as provided below:
  - i) A required one-on-one chaperone who is a parent, guardian or other family-designated adult who has been properly registered and screened (received Class A volunteer screening).
  - ii) Married athletes who are both attending the event as members of a registered delegation. This exception does not apply to the spouse of an athlete who is not participating in the event, but attending solely as a spectator.
  - iii) Married volunteers who are both attending the event as members of a registered delegation. This exception does not apply if one of the volunteers is required to share a room with an athlete except as noted above in 3) c) i) (other than the married couple's child), as this scenario will create a situation whereby an athlete is housed with a volunteer of the opposite sex.
  - iv) Housing in a facility that has multiple private rooms in addition to living space (such as a condominium or dormitory). Both males and females may be assigned to one condominium, if necessary, but private rooms may not be shared by individuals of the opposite sex. Chaperones must also be housed in the condominium and the chaperone/athlete ratio (as outlined above) must be maintained.
  - v) Use of barracks or other facility (such as a gym) where a large number of individuals are assigned to one room. Athletes and volunteers must be separated as much as possible by gender (for example, females on one side of the gym and males on the other side).
- d) All reasonable efforts will be made to house individuals of appropriate age ranges together.
  - i) In order to participate in an overnight event, athletes or Unified Partners under the age of ten (10) must be accompanied by a properly registered and screened parent,

guardian, or other family-designated adult individual, who will room with the athlete/Unified Partner for the duration of the overnight event. For purposes of this requirement “properly registered and screened” means the individual has completed Class A volunteer screening.

- (1) The athlete/Unified Partner and parent, guardian or family-designated adult individual may not stay in the same hotel, motel, or dorm room with other members of the delegation.
  - (2) The arrangement for housing an athlete/Unified Partner under this section with a parent, guardian or family-designated adult individual may not be considered for purposes of determining the delegation’s 4:1 athlete to volunteer ratio.
- ii) Under no circumstances is an athlete/Unified Partner 18 years of age or older permitted to room with an athlete/Unified Partner 13 years of age or younger. When athletes/Unified Partners over 18 years of age are rooming with athletes/Unified Partners under 18 years of age, there shall be no more than a four year age difference between the youngest and oldest of those athletes/Unified Partners. This same four year age differential limitation will be applied in the event a minor coach/volunteer must be roomed with an adult coach/volunteer.
  - iii) To the maximum extent possible, when athletes/Unified Partners between the ages of 10 and 17 will be housed together, they shall be housed such that there is no more than a four year age difference between those athletes/Unified Partners.
- e) All reasonable efforts should be made to house athletes of similar functional abilities together. Local programs must note special needs (wheelchair access, allergies, etc.) when submitting housing requests, and reasonable attempts will be made to accommodate such needs within the constraints of this Policy and the limitations of the facility itself. If any such special needs cannot be met, the local program shall give notice to the athlete(s) affected or, in the case of a minor or adult athlete unable to consent on his/her own, to his or her parent or guardian.
  - f) If an athlete is required to have one-to-one supervision at an overnight event due to a previously reported incident/action, the athlete and chaperone may not stay in the same hotel, motel, or dorm room with other members of the delegation. The purpose of the one-to-one supervision is to separate the athlete requiring the one-to-one supervision from the delegation for his/her safety and/or the safety of other athletes.
  - g) In the event a family or family-designated housing assignment is desired which would otherwise be outside of these Policy requirements, such request from the adult athlete or parent/guardian of minor athlete/Unified Partner or adult athlete unable to consent is to be made in writing.

4) Additional Requirements for Housing in Dorms, Hotels, and Motels.

- a) In hotel/motel environments, a maximum of two (2) athletes/Unified Partners under age 18 may share a bed (double size or larger). Athletes/Unified Partners age 18 and older will not share beds. Coaches/volunteers will not share beds, regardless of age.
- b) In situations permitted by paragraph 4 (a), when the number of athletes/Unified Partners assigned to a hotel/motel room exceeds the number of available beds, volunteers should promote the use of sleeping bags, request cots from the hotel/motel, use pull-out beds or couch cushions to fashion additional makeshift beds (if permitted by fire ordinances), and/or use additional bedding in an “over/under” arrangement (with one athlete under the covers and the other on top of the covers with the additional bedding) to maximize potential sleeping arrangements.
- c) In dorms, no one will share beds.
- d) Under no circumstances may a SOPA coach, Unified Partner, volunteer or chaperone be assigned to share a room with an athlete of any age or gender unless the chaperone is a parent, guardian or other family-designated adult of the athlete, and that chaperone has been properly registered and screened (received Class A volunteer screening).

5) Suggestions for providing athlete/Unified Partner housing supervision:

General suggestions:

Best efforts should be made to always have at least 2 volunteers present and minimize the likelihood of a volunteer being alone with an athlete. The required 4:1 athlete/coach chaperoning ratio must be maintained at all times (however, as noted in 2(b) above, proper supervision can be maintained without having a chaperone present in the room at all times during overnight events).

Technology is becoming more and more a part of our lives, and appropriate use of cameras, imaging and similar digital devices should be enforced. For example, use of such devices in showers, restrooms, or other areas where privacy is expected by participants is prohibited.

Specific suggestions for various housing situations:

- a) Hotels. Whenever possible, reserve connecting rooms so that chaperones/ volunteers have direct access to the athletes’/Unified Partners’ room(s). If connecting rooms are not available:
  - i) Ensure that the chaperone has a key to the athletes’/Unified Partners’ room(s).
  - ii) Ensure that the athletes /Unified Partners know how to reach the chaperone at all times.
- b) Condo/Dorm (or other facility with multiple private rooms) – Whenever possible, leave the doors to private rooms open (unlocked) so that chaperones can monitor each room.

- c) Cabins or Barracks (or other facility with a large number of beds in one room) –  
Whenever possible, chaperones should be assigned to a location in close proximity to the athletes/Unified Partners he/she is supervising. No less than (2) Class A registered adult chaperones will be assigned to each cabin or barracks regardless of the number of athletes/Unified Partners assigned to the same.
  
- 6) SOPA will attempt to station medical and security personnel at each housing facility (hotel/motel/dorm) utilized during an event and a specific room(s) will be designated for these personnel. Such personnel may be medical/security professionals or Special Olympics volunteers designated for these roles. In addition, where possible, a SOPA state office staff person will be housed in each of these facilities. Whenever feasible, overnight roaming security patrols will be implemented for delegation safety. Individuals conducting such patrols may be security professionals or Special Olympics volunteers designated for this role.