

Pupil Protection Law - Lists to be Released Very Soon

The State of Michigan has announced that the list of school employees with past offenses in their background will be released before the end of January.

We know that most of the newspapers in the state have already submitted FOIA requests for the lists, so it is likely that papers will have the list the day schools have it. This could create a media frenzy and someone with a misdemeanor on his record from 30 years ago could be dragged through the mud as a result of the lists release. There are some things you should keep in mind.

First, if you have a past conviction and you haven't been in contact with the Uniserv director, do so immediately.

Second, the list may have errors on it.

Third, the media may come looking for anyone connected to education to interview or make comments about people whose names are on the list.

Here is a primer on how to deal with aggressive media requests for comments about the list or people on it.

1. You are not obligated to answer a question just because it is asked
2. Refuse to be drawn in to the fray. Have an appropriate comment ready and refuse to be taken off the comment. An appropriate comment might be something like this: "I am confident the proper people will be dealing with the matter." or "I have nothing of interest to say."
3. If asked any follow up, e.g. "What do you mean by that?" repeat, "I am confident the proper people will deal with the matter." or "I have nothing to say."
4. A common tactic is to try to put words in your mouth- for example- "Does that mean you think that someone should take action?" Respond: "I am sure the proper people will deal with the matter?"
5. Don't be fooled by off the record. It doesn't exist. Your "off the record comment" may be repeated to someone else and attributed to you to get others to say something.
6. Don't get defensive. Don't explain your comment.
7. Refer the reporter to the Superintendent. Every time you repeat your safe response, follow it with "you really need to talk to the superintendent."
8. **NEVER ARGUE WITH THE MEDIA, EVEN IF YOU KNOW SOMETHING THEY JUST SAID IS WRONG.** You can't win an argument with people who buy ink by the barrel or have the option to edit the videotape to their own liking!
9. Keep walking. Get in your car. Drive away. Close the door. Do whatever you were doing before the question was asked. Go about your business and end the opportunity. Protect yourself from becoming a part of the story.