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Background Check Policy FAQs

Paws With A Cause® (PAWS®) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for its employees, clients and volunteers. PAWS has adopted a policy on background screening for prospective constituents, as well as for continuing constituents in certain circumstances.

Why is PAWS conducting background checks?

Background checks are becoming a necessity of conducting business in order to manage risk. PAWS serves clients with disabilities, some which may have judgment issues or mental impairments. Many clients also have legal guardians and/or aides in the household. Additionally, PAWS works with live animals and we have due diligence responsibility to all of our constituents regarding their safety. We must know who our constituents are and we have a duty to our clients, employees, volunteers and donors to provide a safe environment in which to fulfill our mission. The ultimate goal is to verify identity and eliminate potential problems, especially those that could arise from undisclosed criminal history.

This Policy is being established in an effort to improve our current process, prevent constituents from being exposed to negative influences and to follow the laws and regulations regarding the vulnerable populations PAWS serves (people with disabilities, the elderly and children). Additionally, we must take all necessary steps to protect our donors' investment in each Assistance Dog.

Who does this policy apply to?

PAWS currently conducts a background check on all prospective employees, as well as applicants for Assistance Dogs and members of their household who are 18 years and older (prior to a Needs Assessment).

Effective November 15, 2014, background checks will be run on the following constituents:

- Members of the Board of Directors
- Volunteer Committee Members
- Independent Contractors (including PAWS Field Representatives)
- Breeding Stock Host family members (those 18 years and older in the home)
- Foster Puppy family members (those 18 years and older in the home) – prior to an in-home interview to raise a new puppy
- General volunteers (presenters, Interns, Court Service Workers; anyone performing a volunteer function)
- Current PAWS clients – upon completion of Successor Dog application

Will constituents be rechecked at any point?

Effective November 15, 2014, after initial background checks are done according to the above guidelines, rechecks will be completed every six (6) years for all constituents, with the following exceptions:

- Volunteer Presenters will be checked annually
- Employees will be checked every six (6) years or when promoted

Should we become aware of new criminal conviction information on any constituent at any time, we will investigate and act in accordance with legal compliance requirements and conduct a background check regardless of the established schedule.

Why is PAWS doing this now; is this a change in policy?

PAWS has conducted background checks on prospective employees for years and recently implemented background checks on applicants for Assistance Dogs and members of their household who are 18 years and older (prior to a Needs Assessment). Upon recommendation of legal counsel and in an effort to manage risk, we felt it necessary to implement background checks at all levels of our organization. Volunteers contribute thousands of hours of service to PAWS in many capacities: as Board Members; as presenters; as volunteers at information booths; as Foster Puppy Raisers; as Breeding Stock Hosts; as interns; and as general volunteers. PAWS needed to create a background check policy that keeps all PAWS' constituents and PAWS' Dogs as safe and protected as possible, to reduce the risks to our constituents and to PAWS, as we continue to work together to bring our mission to some vulnerable populations.

What information will be gathered in the background checks and how will it be obtained?

The Human Resource Department will coordinate criminal background and identity verification checks for constituents. PAWS will be running background checks through a third party vendor. By using this vendor, we obtain the most comprehensive information at the most reasonable cost. Our policy addresses many principles relating to criminal convictions, including the nature and gravity of an offense, the time passed since an offense and the position sought. We will document and track the information that is found, along with our decisions.

How will PAWS handle this confidential information?

The results will be delivered from the vendor directly to the Human Resource department at PAWS and kept confidential. Only the Human Resource department and the head of the department affected will be made aware of the results. The information will be kept in locked file cabinets within the locked Human Resource file room.

Will the complete results of the background check be shared?

Should a background check yield adverse results, PAWS will contact the individual and provide for an opportunity to verify and discuss the results. Each case will be handled on an individual basis.

If we're placing puppies with inmates in prisons, why are we checking volunteer backgrounds?

The inmates at the Michigan Reformatory in Ionia who are part of our pilot training program have been vetted and screened. Their offenses for their convictions were not predatory or aggressive in nature. They are under constant supervision within the reformatory and are not going into the public or into private homes. PAWS volunteers and contract laborers are out in public and in people private homes on behalf of PAWS on a daily basis. This increases the 'risk' factor and therefore, the background checks need to be completed.