

June 4, 2026

Larry Barabino, Jr., CEO  
New Orleans Recreation Development Commission  
5430 Franklin Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70122

Re: Youth Athletics Background Checks

Dear Mr. Barabino:

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is authorized to comment on “rules, regulations, policies, procedures, and transactions” for the purpose of preventing fraud, waste, and abuse, or promoting efficient and effective government.<sup>1</sup> This letter addresses deficiencies in the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission’s (NORDC) policies and procedures for collecting, processing, evaluating, and recording background information about individuals involved with its youth athletics programming. It grew out of a broader OIG evaluation of NORDC’s management of youth sports; however significant concerns related to child safety required timely release in advance of the full evaluation. Specifically, the OIG found NORDC only had current background checks on file for approximately half of the volunteers who coached youth sports teams in 2025.

In New Orleans, public recreational programs like youth sports leagues are provided through NORDC, a commission of the City of New Orleans (the City) whose mission is to “advance the physical, mental, and social well-being of New Orleanians by providing safe and welcoming environments for recreational, athletic, and cultural experiences.”<sup>2</sup> According to NORDC, the organization’s youth athletics teams served more than 5,000 registrants in 2025, an increase of nearly 500 from the previous year.

The vast majority of NORDC’s youth sports teams were coached by volunteers. These coaches were responsible for teaching children athletic skills, while positively influencing their physical and emotional health.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, some coaches were entrusted with handling registration fees and other team finances, with little to no oversight from NORDC regarding how those funds were managed and what they were used for.<sup>4</sup>

Given the significant role of coaches in the lives of many young people, NORDC instituted policies and procedures aimed at ensuring the adults who worked with youth athletes were properly vetted. NORDC’s written policies required volunteer coaches to submit and clear a new background check each year.<sup>5</sup> According to NORDC representatives, the organization also had a small number of staff members who

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<sup>1</sup> City Charter Sec. 9-401(2); City Code Sec. 2-1120(2) and (10)(f).

<sup>2</sup> City of New Orleans, *2025 Adopted Annual Operating Budget* (New Orleans, LA: City of New Orleans, 2024), <https://nola.openbook.questica.com/#/budget-book/20f8ecf6-1840-492b-86e1-d967d9792842/10328772-2e8a-44ea-8392-a41b49d4887f>.

<sup>3</sup> New Orleans Recreation Development Commission, *Coaches’ Code of Conduct*.

<sup>4</sup> A forthcoming OIG evaluation will address oversight of team funds in greater detail.

<sup>5</sup> New Orleans Recreation Development Commission, *Athletics Division Handbook, Standards of Behavior, S.O.P., Sports: Football (Tackle)*, Revised April 2025, 7.

coached sports teams, but it was unclear whether staff coaches were required to submit background checks as well. A NORDC administrator reported that staff coaches were required to pass annual background checks, but the same staff member later told OIG evaluators that they did not.

The requirement for background checks, at least for volunteer coaches, aligned with standards established by NORDC's national accreditation body, the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), which required organizations to maintain "procedures on background screening" and stated, "[b]ackground investigations shall be made for all volunteers who work routinely with vulnerable populations, especially youth, senior adults, and persons with disabilities."<sup>6</sup> NORDC administrative staff informed OIG evaluators that coaches were not allowed to enter the field during games without an official NORDC-issued identification badge (ID), and that such IDs were not issued until a current background check was on file.

Despite this, the OIG interviewed current and former NORDC coaches, who reported inconsistencies within NORDC's background check and ID enforcement processes. More than one current coach told evaluators that NORDC no longer enforced its requirement that all coaches wear NORDC-issued ID badges during games, making it impossible to determine who had authorized access to the team. Coaches also expressed concern about the background check process, with one former coach questioning whether NORDC actually submitted background check waivers for processing. The combination of these issues, as one coach described it, "means random people are coaching and on the field."

### **NORDC Could Not Produce an Accurate List of Authorized Youth Sports Coaches and Failed to Consistently Enforce its Own Background Check Policy**

The OIG determined that coaches' concerns about the adequacy of NORDC's background check process were well-founded. NORDC provided OIG evaluators with multiple lists of current coaches, some of which contained contradictory information. Although the lists covered the same time period, each list included names that did not appear on the other list. A NORDC representative informed the OIG that the organization was "unable to generate a comprehensive list of recognized coaches for 2025." Further, NORDC had been unable to provide background check information for all coaches named in the organization's various lists when asked during a related OIG project. NORDC administrators opined that background checks may not be available because the lists potentially included individuals who began the application process but did not complete it.

Based on the information provided by NORDC, it was impossible for OIG evaluators to verify that the agency had conducted background checks on all active coaches. Therefore, the OIG obtained NORDC's 2025 application files for all volunteer coaches in the athletics division, a total of about 275 application files. Of these, the OIG used NORDC's most comprehensive list of coaches for the 2025 season to randomly select 50 files for additional review. Based on this review, evaluators found that only 54 percent of the sample had background checks on file.

NORDC also failed to process background check authorization forms for many youth sports coaches, in violation of the organization's policies. While NORDC's policies stated that volunteer coaches must undergo an annual background check, evaluators found that, of the applicants without background checks, eight (16 percent of the total sample) had signed but unprocessed background check authorization forms on file.

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<sup>6</sup> Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies, *The National Accreditation Standards, Sixth Edition* (National Recreation and Park Association, 2019), 85.

NORDC stated there was no reason a completed background check waiver for an active coach should go unprocessed.

In consideration of NORDC's statement that the list provided may contain people who applied but did not actually coach, OIG evaluators searched publicly available information on the internet and social media for five of the people without background checks on file. Evaluators found photographic evidence that at least three of the five individuals coached NORDC teams in 2025.

### **NORDC Lacked Adequate Procedures for Evaluating Background Check Information and Relied on Background Checks That Were Too Narrow to Provide Meaningful Information**

NORDC's administration informed OIG evaluators that the organization had no written policies or procedures for collecting, processing, evaluating, and storing coach applications and background checks. However, evaluators found that NORDC's coach application included guidelines for screening volunteer background checks. According to the application, the volunteer screening process included sex offender registry checks and "Criminal background records/information." The application form stated a volunteer would be disqualified if they had been convicted or pled guilty to any sexual offense, violent felony, or crime against children, regardless of how long ago the offense occurred. Non-violent felonies within ten years, violent misdemeanors within five years, and non-violent misdemeanors within three years also disqualified a volunteer from coaching. Additionally, the application stated individuals with pending cases involving any disqualifying offenses "may not be permitted to volunteer until official adjudication of the case."

According to NORDC administrators, the organization's volunteer coordinator submitted background checks to the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office (OPSO) for processing and performed a preliminary evaluation of their content. If the volunteer coordinator identified potential problems with the background check, they were supposed to refer the issue to the Athletic Director. If a background check contained charges for which the outcome was unclear, including charges for which the disposition stated "NO DISPOSITION" or "HOLD FOR COURT," NORDC administrators said the coach was required to provide proof of disposition, and that proof should be added to the coach's file. Similarly, coaches with open warrants were required to provide proof that their warrants had been cleared.

NORDC's evaluation process was ineffective, though, because the information included in the background checks did not reflect the current disposition of cases. Further, the department failed to require and preserve documentation that charges had been dropped. Within the OIG's 50-person random sample, multiple files with completed background checks contained charges that appeared to violate NORDC's guidelines, most of which did not include final dispositions. Of the approximately 275 volunteer application files the OIG reviewed, evaluators did not find a single instance in which NORDC saved additional documentation as to the disposition of a case.

For example, evaluators found one NORDC coach whose background check showed an active warrant for simple battery and 46 criminal charges, some dating back to 2000. Of those charges, only one indicated that charges had been dropped or refused. Of the remaining charges, 33 had a disposition of "HOLD FOR COURT," seven reported "NO DISPOSITION," and six stated "Continued Unknown." These charges involved a variety of crimes, from theft, criminal trespass, and domestic violence which are misdemeanors, to aggravated battery, a violent felony offense. They also included seven offenses described simply as "FUGITIVE." A representative of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) informed evaluators that a FUGITIVE charge indicated that the individual had an open fugitive attachment somewhere outside Orleans Parish, but said

the system did not display the location or nature of the offense. While all of the charges occurred at least ten years prior to the OIG's review, NORDC's volunteer application lists violent felony offenses like aggravated battery as disqualifiers regardless of the amount of time passed. A review of court records revealed that the aggravated battery charge was refused, though NORDC's application file did not contain documentation to that effect. Additionally, the coach's file contained no documents that clarified the disposition of any other cases or the charges involved in fugitive warrants. Nonetheless, evaluators found publicly available evidence that the individual was actually involved in youth sports through NORDC in 2025.

Similarly, another active coach's background check included charges as recent as 2025 for simple assault and stalking, an aggravated rape charge from 2008, arrests for illegal use of controlled dangerous substances in the presence of a minor, and possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime. The file contained no additional documentation regarding the disposition of any of these charges. A search of Orleans Parish Criminal Court records revealed that the aggravated rape, assault, and stalking charges were ultimately dropped. However, the stalking and assault charges were still active at the time NORDC's background check was conducted. Because there was no documentation in the file, it is unclear whether NORDC was aware of the disposition of these cases, including those that were still pending. Despite this, evaluators found publicly-available evidence that the individual was actually coaching youth sports through NORDC in 2025.

The OIG informed NORDC about the concerns with these two application files and the administrator confirmed that the individuals should not be eligible and were informed they could no longer volunteer. However, it is possible that coaches had additional criminal histories that did not show up in the organization's records. This is because OPSO obtained background checks using the NOPD's CASTNet system, which was limited to offenses that occurred in Orleans Parish or those that surrounding parishes voluntarily entered. As such, they did not consistently reflect offenses that occurred in any other jurisdiction. NORDC administrators were aware of CASTNet's jurisdictional limitations, but relied on it nonetheless. One NORDC administrator informed OIG evaluators that nationwide background checks would prove difficult for some current coaches to pass. "Guys would be running out. They'd be scared" of a nationwide background search, he said. Finally, CASTNet did not include dispositions for almost any charges, making it impossible for NORDC to rely on it to determine whether a prospective coach had actually been convicted of a crime.

## **Recommendations**

NORDC's lax procedures for documenting and screening potential coaches, despite policies stating all coaches must pass annual background checks, created a false assurance for parents who likely believed their children's coaches had been vetted when, in fact, many had not. As summer approaches, it is crucial for NORDC to address significant deficiencies in its process for approving youth athletics coaches immediately. As documented in this letter, NORDC's current procedures for processing coaching applications are both inconsistent and inadequate, resulting in an inability to perform very basic tasks like identifying all coaches who were authorized to interact with youth on behalf of the City. The OIG urges NORDC's leadership to rapidly address the following issues.

NORDC should develop a formal, written process for documenting names and contact information of officially recognized youth sports coaches. The process should include which NORDC employees are responsible for which elements of the procedure. In particular, NORDC should adopt standard procedures for organizing and saving all components of a coach's application file. NORDC should maintain an accurate roster of coaches in an electronic format that explicitly identifies which coaching applications are approved, documents when individuals receive NORDC coach IDs, and is easily accessible by all relevant staff members.

NORDC should fully commit to actually processing background check authorizations for all coaches. The organization should implement control mechanisms for ensuring that each coach has an annual, processed background check on file with all required documentation before an ID badge is issued. Similarly, NORDC should adopt and implement formal, written policies and procedures for evaluating background checks of prospective coaches. The organization should draft clear disqualification criteria and create guidelines for documenting when charges against a potential volunteer have been dropped. Further, NORDC should implement internal controls that require a designated staff member to officially certify that background checks do not include disqualifying offenses.

Finally, NORDC should make every effort to obtain nationwide background checks that provide accurate dispositions for as many cases as possible. This would align NORDC with neighboring communities, like Jefferson Parish, which uses a third-party company to fingerprint and conduct background checks on potential coaches. While such background checks may require financial resources from the City, the move to more reliable and comprehensive background checks will be well worth the investment if it helps protect vulnerable youth from those who might take advantage of them or of money raised on their behalf.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward Michel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot above the letter 'i' in "Michel".

Edward Michel, CIG  
Inspector General