

Safe Church Policy

West Lebanon Congregational Church, U.C.C.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs." (Matthew 19:14)

Adopted April 15, 2018

Section 1 – Safe Church Policy Summary & Overview

Parts I-VI: Policy Overview and Requirements

I. Policy Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation and Harassment – General Statement

As a community of Christian faith, the West Lebanon Congregational Church is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities and a community in which members, friends, staff and volunteers can worship, learn and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation or intimidation. All persons associated with West Lebanon Congregational Church should be aware that the church is strongly opposed to Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment and that such behavior is prohibited by church policy. No known sex offenders will be engaged by the West Lebanon Congregational Church, UCC to work with children and youth. It is the intention of the church to take action in an attempt to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy and, if necessary, to discipline those persons who violate this policy.

Regarding Ministerial Conduct. Consistent with our understanding of the priesthood of all believers, all Authorized Ministers, employees, elected and appointed lay leaders, and authorized volunteers – all for the purpose of this policy, are considered Ministers to the congregation.

It is important that every Minister to the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others, and to understand the ways in which their use or misuse of authority may impact others.

It is the policy of the West Lebanon Congregational Church to encourage its Ministers to nurture safety within Ministerial Relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

Sexual Exploitation or Sexual Harassment of parishioners or others by anyone engaged in ministry on behalf of the West Lebanon Congregational Church is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

II. Policy Overview

To that end, this policy:

- Requires that classes and classrooms be configured to eliminate the possibility of children being isolated, and mandates specific rules for each program and activity for children and youth, inside and outside the church building, to ensure safety.
- Provides a systematic, regular program of education about child abuse for the congregation, parents, youth volunteers and staff, children, and visitors.

- Requires that those who work with children and youth, paid staff or volunteer, be screened and educated about the issues of abuse, and trained to recognize signs of abuse.
- Establishes a procedure to ensure that all allegations of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse against a child, by an adult or another child, be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and appropriately, and that all involved be supported and treated with respect and compassion.
- Encourages this congregation to find appropriate ways to continue to live in the spirit of covenant through its commitment to support and accountability.

III. Requirements for Commencing and Continuing Ministry

- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will submit an Authorized Application and Disclosure Form.
- Before beginning their duties, all Ministers will be personally interviewed to assess the suitability of their character and qualifications for the position they seek.
- The church will conduct a registered sex offender review for each Minister by searching their name on the Department of Justice website at www.nsofr.gov or through the services of Praesidium Inc. This registered sex offender review will be repeated on an annual basis for all Ministers.
- Authorized Ministers of the West Lebanon Congregational Church will attend all boundary workshops as required by New Hampshire Conference and its Grafton Orange Sullivan Association.

IV. Additional Requirements for Child and Youth Ministry

West Lebanon Congregational Church is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love. In order to promote this, we have established the following guidelines in addition to the general requirements for ministry to the church.

- We expect that those who volunteer to work with minors will have been participating in the community of the West Lebanon Congregational Church for at least six months or likewise have be an active member of another UCC congregation prior to volunteering in children and youth ministries. Those who work with youth and children will complete a Safe Church Orientation.
- All volunteers who regularly work with children and youth will complete and submit an **Authorized Application and Disclosure Form**.
- Before beginning their duties, all prospective Christian Education volunteers will undergo a background check, including but not necessarily limited to inquiries of references and a criminal history verification. Evaluation of the background check will be performed by the Authorized Minister (who will then consult with either the volunteer in question or the Christian Education committee chair in a confidential manner).
- All volunteers and employees who regularly work with children and youth will receive Safe Church orientation regarding Safe Church Policy and procedures.
- It is the policy of this church to provide adequate supervision and safeguards for all youth activities.

- Written consent of one parent or guardian of a minor will be required for all activities off the church property, and any overnight activities.
- A participating youth's parent will be asked to chaperone any activity that is not held in a public place.
- Our policy is to always have two (2) unrelated adults present whenever youth or children are gathered. However, at present we allow the following exceptions:
 1. A youth leader may gather youth as a sole responsible adult when and if in a publicly shared space.
 2. In rare or extenuating circumstances when the two-unrelated adult rule cannot be met, a screened roaming volunteer shall be in place.
 3. If the location of the bathroom is not close to the learning center or gathering area, we allow one (1) adult to take children (plural) to the bathroom (door) avoiding a one-on-one ratio.
- All children and youth learning spaces will have an open line of sight. Learning spaces are to be made as public as possible.

V. The Safe Church Team

A. Description and Makeup

As part of this policy, a Safe Church Team of three people will be established to provide ongoing review and implementation of the policy. Team members will undergo background checks and training on the issue of child abuse before being allowed to serve. The team will conduct screening of staff, teachers, and volunteers who work with children and youth and oversee the educational component of the policy. These appointed positions will be approved by Church Board. It is recommended that one Safe Church Team member be a Trustee or elected representative, a second member be a Deacon or representative from the Board of Christian Education, and the third member be from the congregation at-large. The three members of the Safe Church Team cannot serve simultaneously on the abuse response team.

Members of the Safe Church Team will commit to a three-year term, in such a manner that the term of one member expires each year. A Safe Church Team member may serve two consecutive terms, and then shall be ineligible for one year. The Safe Church Team is tasked with ensuring the confidentiality of all volunteers and potential volunteers. (Its responsibilities are spelled out in detail in Roles and Responsibilities of the Safe Church Team Section IX, pg. 8 of the policy).

B. Safe Church Team Contacts

1. The three Safe Church Team representatives name and telephone numbers will be listed in the Safe Church policy and overview/summary that will be posted in public places. (See pages 7-9 on Role and Responsibilities of the Safe Church Team).

VI. The Response Team

A. Description and Makeup

The Response Team will consist of the church Moderator, a Trustee or representative from the church and a Deacon or representative of the church. (Its responsibilities are spelled out in detail in the Allegations of Abuse and Congregational Response, Section X, pg.9 of the policy).

The members of the Response Team have the responsibility of receiving and acting on allegations of abuse.

B. Response Team Contacts

The three Response Team representatives name and telephone numbers will be listed in the Safe Church policy and overview/summary that will be posted in public places. (See Part X, pg. 9 for Role and Responsibilities of the Response Team)

Section 2

Part VII A - Policies and B - Procedures – Specific Ministries

VII. Children and Youth Ministries – Policy and Procedures

A. Policy

- Maintaining child and youth safety within our church and understanding our practices is a matter for covenant within our congregation.
- Whenever possible, at least two non-related (for the purposes of this policy “related” means spouses, partners, family members) adults should be involved in any youth activity.
- When two adults cannot be present in a child and/or youth activity, random checks by another unrelated adult shall be employed.
- Pages 1-4 of our policy will be clearly posted at the official points of entry into our building, in the office, hallway and classrooms.
- These guidelines and policies in their entirety will be clearly available in all classrooms and common spaces.
- All volunteers working with children and youth programs must participate in training at least once every year.
- For the purpose of our Safe Church policies, youth will be considered to be any minor who participates in a church-sponsored youth ministry program. Adult leaders will be clearly identified beforehand.
- All designated youth volunteers must be over 18 yrs. old and 2 yrs. older than the oldest participant.
- Trained youth (non-adult) over the age of 14 may assist with Nursery activities or assist a non-related adult with Sunday School activities.
- No one under the age of 21 will be allowed to drive other participants in any church-sponsored activity or event that requires the group to travel together to a destination outside the church building.
- Use of email, social media, and cell phone texting will be limited to group communications. Adult volunteers should avoid “friending” children and youth.

B. Procedures

B1. Sunday School

1. Windows are required in all classroom doors and must remain uncovered. Or, the doors must remain open.
2. Education and screening is required for all prospective teachers and other volunteers. (see Part IX pp.7-8; also Overview pp. 1-4)
3. All activities will be kept in plain view.
4. Acceptable supervisory methods include the following:
 - a. Two unrelated teachers in the classroom.
 - b. When a (above) cannot be met, a roaming screened volunteer may be used.
5. If the location of the bathroom is not close to the learning center or gathering area, we allow one (1) adult to take children (plural) to the bathroom (door) avoiding a one-on-one ratio. If a child needs assistance in a bathroom for whatever reason, when possible, the child’s parent will be asked to provide that assistance.

B2. Nursery Care

1. Windows are required in all classroom doors and must remain uncovered. Or, the doors must remain open.

2. Education and screening per this policy is required for volunteers and paid workers. (see Part IX pp.7-8; also see Overview pp. 1-4)
3. All activities will be kept in plain view.
4. Acceptable supervisory methods include the following:
 - a. Two unrelated, trained and screened volunteers
 - b. When a (above) cannot be met, a roaming screened volunteer may be used.
5. If a child out of diapers needs assistance in the bathroom, when possible the child's parent will be asked to provide that assistance. Otherwise, if a single child needs assistance in the bathroom, a second adult volunteer should be present.

B3. Youth (6th-12th grade) Programming

1. Open spaces or rooms with windows in their doors will be used.
2. A minimum of two-unrelated adults should be present for all activities. If two-unrelated adults cannot supervise, then a roaming screened volunteer should be used.
3. Education and screening will be required for all adult volunteers. (See Part IX pp.7-8; also see Overview pp. 1-4)
4. All volunteers must be adults over the age of 18 and be a minimum of 2 years older than the oldest youth they are supervising.
5. Education is required for all youth every year
6. All participants are required to submit a signed legal guardian/parent permission slip for any youth activity that takes place off church property.
7. All activities must be kept in plain view.
8. Any contact with youth using text, social media, or email messages will be only as group texts with at least two unrelated adults included in the recipients.

B4. Specific Ministries – Overnights (JMS)

1. All activities must be kept in plain view using open spaces or rooms with windows in their doors or with doors open.
2. Education and screening is required for all adult volunteers. (see Part IX pp.7-8; also see Overview pp. 1-4)
3. Multiple (more than two-unrelated) adult volunteers shall be required for all activities.
4. All volunteers must be adults over the age of 21.
5. All participants must sign an appropriate child and youth safety covenant that will be reviewed with group (i.e: the "givens") at beginning of an overnight.
6. All youth participants must have a signed permission slip from a parent or legal guardian.
7. Lights must be kept on except during specified sleeping hours or movie-watching.
8. Overnights must have a designated lock time.
9. Adult supervisors must actively seek to prevent inappropriate or abusive youth/youth behavior.

B5. Specific Ministries – Confirmation

1. All activities must be kept in plain view using open spaces or rooms with windows in their doors or doors left open.
2. All one-to-one meetings between confirmand and mentor will occur at church and will be visible and subject to supervision.
3. Education and screening will be required for all mentors. (see Part IX pp.7-8; also see Overview pp. 1-4)
4. Education within the past year is required for all youth and their parents. (See pg. 8)
5. All activities must be kept in plain view.
6. All off-site activities require a minimum of two mentors and/or screened volunteers.

7. All youth participants must sign an appropriate child and youth safety covenant and have a signed legal guardian/parent permission slip.

B6. Specific Ministries - Out of Town Trips

1. A ratio of one adult to every five youth/children is recommended.
2. At least two non-related adults, are necessary to accompany all off site and out of town activities.
3. Education and screening will be required for all adult volunteers. (see Part IX pp.7-8; also see Overview pp. 1-4)
4. All activities must be kept in plain view.
5. All participants must sign an appropriate child and youth safety covenant and have a signed legal guardian/parent permission slip. Information about the Safe Church Policy will be made available to parents of non-regular attendees of the church who are participating.

B7. Specific Ministries - Pastoral Counseling for Youth and Adults

1. This policy and appropriate codes of ethics will be clearly posted.
2. Continuing education of appropriate and ethical boundaries is required of the pastor.
3. When a child or youth receives pastoral care, another adult must be present in building.

B8. Rides for Children and Youth

1. Education and screening is required of all adult volunteer drivers for authorized youth outings (see Part IX pp.7-8; also see Overview pp. 1-4)
2. Proof of insurance for private vehicles used in transporting for youth events will be provided/kept on file at the church.
2. When traveling as a group, all the authorized and approved cars in the caravan must follow a planned route and must arrange a plan of communication for the time of travel.
3. Two screened non-related adults shall be present at the church until all youth have been picked up.
4. West Lebanon Congregational Church is not responsible for any parental ride arrangements to and from activity sites.

B9. Outside Groups Using Our Facilities

1. Must be provided with a copy of our Church Use policies and sign that they have read and understand our policies.
2. Must sign a liability release form to release West Lebanon Congregational Church from any and all potential liability that may result from any activity undertaken on West Lebanon Congregational Church property.

Section 3

Parts VIII – X Training & Education, Roles and Responsibilities of the Safe Church Team and Response Team

VIII. Training & Information: Recurring & Continuing Education about Child Abuse

Important components of a Safe Church Policy are recurring and age appropriate education about child safety/child abuse prevention and the West Lebanon Congregational Church Safe Church policies and procedures. Consistent and routine education will be provided to the congregation including our children and youth.

A. Policy

- Children and youth volunteers will be educated about child safety prior to beginning their ministries.

- Education and training about child abuse will take place on a regular and systematic basis within the church and its programs.
- Adult and youth in the congregation who will be engaging in broad and potentially risky ministries, such as a youth mission trip or being a Confirmation mentor, will be provided with additional child safety educational opportunities.
- Safe Church Policy training will include information on and requirements of the New Hampshire mandated reporting laws.

B. Procedures

The education and training component includes the following:

1. The Safe Church Policy and Procedures Overview pages will be posted in readily visible areas of the church and made available to anyone.
2. Annual training will take place on child abuse for the pastoral staff, the church moderator, and all adult volunteers. This training will be publicized, and individuals from the congregation will also be invited to attend.
3. WLCC will provide information to parents of all children in Sunday School about the issue of safety and this policy. Suggestions of age appropriate materials for parents to discuss with their children will be provided.
4. A review of Safe Church Policy and Procedures for all Sunday School teachers and volunteers for child and youth activities as part of the regular recruitment process.
5. Information about the Safe Church Policy and Procedures provided to new members as part of their new member classes.
6. Posting summary pages of the Safe Church Policy and Procedures in multiple designated areas of the church.

IX. Role and Responsibilities of the Safe Church Team (see Section I, Part V, pg. 3)

A. Screening and Training Oversight

The Safe Church Team will assure: 1) that the screening of volunteers and paid staff is adequate and complete, 2) that the privacy of the volunteers is protected, 3) and that recurring and continuing education is available to volunteers, children, youth and other members of our congregation. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving our church as a place of safety and protection.

With assistance from the Board of Christian Education, **The Safe Church Team** will be responsible for organizing and scheduling education and training sessions, providing educational materials, and informing members of the congregation about educational and training sessions and materials available.

The Safe Church Team will review these policies and procedures on an annual basis and will take any suggested changes to the Church Board for approval. If changes are needed before the annual review, those changes will also be approved by the Church Board.

The Safe Church Team will review applications and the Authorized Minister will conduct background checks which will remain confidential to protect the privacy of our members, including keeping the files in a locked cabinet at the West Lebanon Congregational Church.

B. Policy Implementation

No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (that is, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect or physical abuse) will be accepted as a volunteer to work with children and youth for any church sponsored activity.

- **The Safe Church Team** will receive training about screening of volunteers and staff from personnel experienced in this field.
- Frequent and long-term volunteers will have an annual background check to keep screening as up to date as possible.
- Each volunteer must have been a regular participant in the worship and life of The West Lebanon Congregational Church for at least six months or an active member of another UCC congregation prior to volunteering in children and youth ministries.
- Paid staff and volunteers working with children and youth shall attend training and educational events, as referenced above in this policy.

C. Procedures

1. **The Safe Church Team** will create a screening process based on criminal justice protocols and the latest research in the field of child abuse prevention, and follow West Lebanon Congregational Church policies, (herein) for background check procedures.
2. All adult volunteers will complete an **Authorized Children and Youth Volunteer Application and Disclosure Form** before beginning their ministry with children and youth.
3. Background checks will be required for all applicants and volunteers over the age of 18 per this policy (See Parts III-V pp. 2-3).
4. All applications and background checks will remain confidential to protect the privacy of our members, including keeping the files in a locked cabinet at the church.

X. Role and Responsibilities of the Response Team regarding Allegations of Abuse and Congregational Response

A. Policy

It is the policy of The West Lebanon Congregational Church that allegations of physical and sexual abuse of children and youth are to be taken seriously and resolved fully and responsibly.

- Volunteers, clergy and other paid staff members working directly with children and youth who have knowledge of or suspicion of abuse of children must immediately report that knowledge or suspicion to an Abuse Response Team member within the church who is designated to deal with such incidents.
- It is the hope of West Lebanon Congregational Church that anyone with knowledge or suspicion of abuse will approach a member of the Response Team.
- The Response Team will in turn immediately report any incidents to the appropriate NH Department of Children, Youth and Families (as detailed in the procedures section below), when deemed appropriate by the West Lebanon Congregational Church executive officers, appropriate officials at the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ, and/or law enforcement.
- The Church Cabinet and the Response Team will cooperate with all aspects of the investigation and will share information with the congregation when possible.
- The pastor will offer support and counsel to alleged abuse victims and their families, and to alleged perpetrators of abuse and their families, if appropriate and if allegation is not related to the pastor. Our church community will pursue additional measures to support alleged abuse victims and their families and/or alleged perpetrators and their families.

- While an allegation or investigation is pending for an individual volunteer or staff member, he or she must suspend activities within child or youth programs at the West Lebanon Congregational Church.

B. Procedures

1. All allegations of abuse shall be regarded seriously, and alleged victims will be treated with respect and courtesy. Concerns will be reported immediately to the Lebanon Police Department and to NH State child protection officials. Alleged victims or alleged perpetrators will not be interviewed by church personnel.
2. All childcare or youth workers are mandated to report any suspected or known child abuse immediately to proper church authorities. These authorities will be the church Moderator and members of the Response Team. If a youth worker cannot follow the normal procedure of reporting an incident to a member of the Response Team for any reason, (for example, if a group is on a mission trip or other out of town youth event.) he or she should immediately contact the local police department.
3. If the alleged perpetrator is a member of the pastoral staff or is a moderator, the church youth worker will inform the non-accused members of the Response Team and UCC leaders outside of the church, in this case to the Conference or Associate Conference Minister of the New Hampshire Conference at 603-225-6647.
4. The Response Team will first immediately contact the NH Department of Children, Youth and Families and secondly, the Lebanon Police Department. If appropriate, the alleged perpetrator will be given the courtesy of being informed that contact with authorities has been made. In the event that said perpetrator is a minor, a parent/guardian will be notified.
5. In consultation with the New Hampshire Department of Children, Youth and Families and local law enforcement, a decision will be made as to whether the Response Team will talk with the person or persons reporting the allegations.
6. When an allegation of abuse is made, it is suggested that the recipient of the report write down what has been alleged using the child's/reporter's words. The recipient of the report is to take down the information without asking investigative or leading questions to the child. This can hurt the investigation. This report should be made available to the investigating authorities.
7. The law enforcement agency having jurisdiction and New Hampshire Department of Children, Youth, and Families will be the investigative body and deal with the alleged perpetrator concerning the accusation.
8. The Response Team will report any allegation to the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ, when deemed appropriate by law enforcement.
9. In consultation with the appropriate legal authorities and in a timely manner, the Response Team will notify Cabinet of the incident, respecting all privacy issues as appropriate to the situation.
10. Church Cabinet, in consultation with the Response Team and the investigative authorities, will determine when and how to best communicate the situation with the congregation.
11. The Moderator is designated as the only spokesperson for communication with the media, if there are media requests for comment or information. If the allegation is against the Moderator, this responsibility will go to another officer of the church. During the investigative stage of any allegation, the church spokesperson should limit statements to the fact that the church takes any allegation seriously and is fully cooperating with authorities. Under no circumstances should a spokesperson discuss any aspect of a case. When an allegation is resolved, members of the pastoral staff or the moderator should consult with the Church Cabinet before issuing any statement or making any comment.
12. If there is a documented false accusation, the Response Team will work to insure the congregation is thoroughly informed that the falsely accused person(s) has been exonerated.

13. After all the necessary investigative avenues have been followed, the Safe Church Team and others asked by the pastor will work to facilitate a healing process and foster a safe and affirming environment for the victims of the abuse, any falsely accused person(s) and for the entire congregation.

Section 4

Parts XI-XII Glossary of Definitions and Appendix

XI. Glossary of Definitions

Minister: a person authorized by the church to carry out its ministry. Ministers include employees of the church, Christian Education volunteers either elected or appointed, as well as Authorized Ministers.

Authorized Minister: a person who holds ordained ministerial standing or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ or a region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). An Authorized Minister is one type of minister within the meaning of this policy.

Ministerial Relationship: the relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

Sexual Exploitation: sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a Minister engaged in a ministerial relationship with another takes advantage of the vulnerability of the person being served by causing or allowing that person to engage in sexual behavior with the Minister.

Sexual Harassment: repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination.

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity.
- Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, e-mails, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits, sexual propositions;

- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
- Visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines.

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence, or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another.

It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church.

It is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold support for an appointment, promotion, or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition; or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

XII. Appendix

- Chart from UCC on complaint procedure
- Workplace information on the nature of harassment
- Liability release form for use of church
- NH Mandated reporting statute
- Limited Access Agreement – regarding registered offenders who attend church and events.
- Application and Disclosure form for employees and youth/children volunteers.
- Information on list of disqualifying offenses for volunteering – Presbyterian resource.
- Permission slip templates for field trips, overnights, transport, recreation activities etc.

Related and relevant UCC Insurance Board forms and resources.

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 West Lebanon Congregational Church, U.C.C.
 Adopted April 15, 2018

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Liability release form for WLCC

NH mandated reporting statute

Sample limited access agreement – re registered offenders

Application and disclosure form for employees and youth/children volunteers

Information on list of disqualifying offenses for volunteering – youth/children
(PCUSA resource)

Permission slip templates for field trips, overnights, transport, recreation etc.

Other forms from Insurance Board as deemed applicable