



National Eating Disorders Association

National Eating Disorders Association  
165 West 46<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 402  
New York, NY 10036

TEL 212.575.6200  
FAX 212.575.1650  
WEB [NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://NationalEatingDisorders.org)

July 18, 2013

Mr. Wayne Brock  
Chief Scouting Officer  
Boy Scouts of America  
National Council  
P.O. Box 152079  
Irving, Texas 75015-2079

Dear Mr. Brock,

On behalf of the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), I am writing to express concern about the Boy Scouts of America's decision to forbid individuals with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 and above from participating in its Jamboree. While we understand and respect the need for the Boy Scouts to verify the physical fitness of Jamboree participants, that decision should not be based on BMI, but instead on a comprehensive medical evaluation by the child's physician. BMI was never intended to be the singular evaluative tool for an individual's health, but is instead more applicable for population level data.

Furthermore, NEDA is very concerned that encouraging members to take such a reductionist view of their health could have unintended negative consequences. A 2001 study found that 16% of adolescent boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors, including bingeing, vomiting, fasting, laxative and diet pill use, and compulsive exercise. In 2011, the Center for Disease Control found that while 15,178 students reported being overweight or obese, nearly 33,000 reported engaging in eating disordered behaviors in the 30 days prior to the survey.

Encouraging youth to lose weight in order to participate in an event of major importance to them can contribute to the development of these unhealthy behaviors. It can also validate anti-fat bias among their peers and contribute to bullying by sending the message that it is acceptable to exclude children of larger size. A 2012 survey by a UK Eating Disorders charity found that 78% of young people with eating disorders say bullying contributed to their illness.

Eating disorders are serious, life-threatening illnesses – anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any mental disorder. We have no doubt that you are concerned for the youth in your organization and intended to encourage health among members, however this is a misguided policy in pursuing that goal. Leaving decisions about a child's health to their physician, working to combat anti-fat bullying among members, and providing modified activities to increase participation by obese children would be much more effective in improving the physical and emotional health of all Boy Scouts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn Grefe".

Lynn Grefe  
President and CEO

