April 6, 2021

National Archery in the Schools Program
Attn: Dr. Tommy Floyd
Board of Directors

By email: [Redacted]

Re: NASP new restrictions on homeschool teams

Dear Dr. Floyd and Board of Directors:

By way of introduction, Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is a national organization whose mission is to make homeschooling possible by preserving homeschool freedom and supporting homeschool families. With over 100,000 member families, we are the world’s largest homeschool advocacy organization. You and HSLDA corresponded in both 2019 and 2020 about our interest in making sure that homeschool students were treated fairly in NASP after several rule changes that negatively affected homeschoolers. Additionally, at least one state homeschool organization (Home Educators Association of Virginia) contacted you in 2020, taking issue with the 2020 rule change. In your latest response to HSLDA, you said that NASP would consider homeschoolers’ “recommendations to help [NASP] in the creation of a set of rules that would be more reflective of the fairness and equity that we seek for all.”

To reiterate my points of last fall, we are very concerned with the recent changes in 2020 which placed homeschoolers in the new category of “non-traditional schools.” This rule requires “All NASP archers on a non-traditional school team [to] reside in the county, parish, or borough the school represents.” As you are aware, several homeschool groups have a long history of working with NASP to introduce students in their co-ops to the wonderful sport of archery. After this mutually beneficial history of NASP working with homeschool groups to ensure that the benefits of participation extend to as many homeschoolers as possible, we are distressed to see that the new restrictions on the definition of “non-traditional” school will now harm homeschoolers’ chances of participating in NASP events.

We strongly recommend that NASP return to its policy of allowing homeschool co-ops to participate as teams, with homeschoolers that reside in nearby counties.
According to the new rule 1.1.6.2. for the 2020-21 competition year, "All NASP® archers on a non-traditional school team must reside in the county, parish, or borough the school represents." For many non-traditional schools, this may make sense. But for homeschool groups, it simply does not. We understand that NASP is trying to prevent the formation of traveling competitive teams under the guise of a "non-traditional" school. But restricting homeschool student participation to only students within a single county ignores decades of historical precedent for how homeschooling operates, and it treats homeschoolers unfairly, since both public and private schools often have shooters who attend their schools from outside county lines.

Homeschoolers are not bound by county lines in the co-ops that they attend. When I was being homeschooled in the late 1980s, our weekly co-op was 2 counties away. My own children have attended co-ops both in our county and outside.

This is not just a small problem. Since my letter to you last fall, many homeschool teams, from South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Kentucky, Alabama, Arizona, New York, and other states, have contacted us with concrete examples of how NASP’s new policy negatively affected homeschool students. Hundreds of homeschool students were unable to participate in any NASP tournaments, and many seniors have missed their last opportunity to participate in their last year of high school. As one teen told us, "We want to compete hard just like anyone else. NASP will definitely be losing a lot of passionate archers if they keep pushing their ridiculous rules."

Let me share with you some of the comments we have received from homeschool families and groups around the country.

• I’m not a super athletic person, soccer and basketball never really appealed to me. But then I was introduced to archery and completely fell in love with the sport. I’ve been a member of a home school co-op since my freshman year, and they were able to assemble a team of kids to compete with under NASP. I remember the year we made it to Nationals, and all of us being so ecstatic! I myself won first place in the high school girls division at my state tournament two years ago; I can hardly put into words how excited and proud I was. I was preparing to live up my last year of being able to shoot under NASP, as were several other seniors that I know. But this has been the first year I couldn’t compete with them. I live out of county, as do many of my teammates, and to say the new rules were a blow would be quite the understatement.

• My state NASP told me that I had to be part of an accredited homeschool co-op to participate. However, there is no way for co-ops to get accredited. I gave up on becoming accredited and began teaching archery to homeschoolers in my own backyard and am signed up to get certified through 4-h.
- There are many places in my state where local schools won’t let homeschoolers participate in the NASP program, so the only place the homeschoolers can compete as a team is through a homeschool co-op. The student should be allowed to take relief across any geographic boundary with a team that accepts the potential archer.

- We have been fighting the rule changes in our state this year. We have 52 archers that attend our homeschool NASP league within a 45 mile radius of our range. We have had no issues competing in our state and have a great relationship with our state coordinator. Our program has unofficially served as a model for our state as the state coordinator has appreciated the camaraderie, passion and sheer joy and excitement of archery that our team has brought to our state. It’s the National NASP program that has been more and more discriminatory to homeschoolers.

- We started our homeschool archery team in 2015 with 12 kids. The next year we had 18, then 28 until this past fall when we had 52 kids show up to join. Those 52 kids represent seven counties. So, I would have to have a minimum of 12 kids in each category (elementary, middle and high school) from every county represented to field a team. I am not sure there are even that many homeschoolers in some of those counties, since our state has a declining population.

- For several years, the NASP rules regarding homeschooled archers have changed annually. Our team has worked to adjust each year, but the recent change that requires a team to be composed of students only residing in a single county has effectively dismantled our ability to compete as a homeschool team.

- We are an archery team from a really small community and we struggle sometimes to have a full team. As coaches, my husband and I both think that ALL kids should be able to be involved in archery if they’re able and wanting to.

- We are the only homeschool archery program in our state. There is no other option for out-of-county homeschoolers; they can’t just go join another homeschool co-op and shoot with their team.

- My son just shot his last state tournament last night as an individual because his team is no more. It was heartbreaking. Many of his teammates didn’t bother because being part of a team is what made it fun. The last 3 years have been spent jumping through NASP hoops just to try to get to be part of the sport he loves.

- My child has competed in NASP archery through our FAITH co-op, for the last two years. This year, however, his team was not allowed to be the “FAITH” Archery Team. Instead, they had to be KY Hardin, or KY LaRue, or named by whichever county they live in. Because we live in Hardin Co, a bigger county, my child was still able to compete on a team. However, our friend, who is one of the
highest-scoring archers on the FAITH team, was not allowed to even be counted as part of the team, simply because he lives in another county. Several other archers also were forced to compete individually. This was unfair both to each individual archer and especially to the team! Public schools were allowed to include all of their archers on their team, even if they did not live in the same county.

- Our homeschool co-op has students in several counties so that really is an issue - I would guess we have families from a minimum of 4 and maybe 5 counties! Pretty impossible to put together a team from the same county!

- We have a 13-year-old daughter that LOVES archery. She practices every chance she gets and enters every tournament within driving distance! This year the pandemic cancelled our official team practices. However, that didn’t stop her! She practiced 3x times as much (if not more) this year. Our county only has around 4 archers so making a team of 12 is impossible. This new regulation will in essence knock my child out of ever going to state or national tournaments through NASP.

- Our entire family has fallen in love with this sport, purchasing equipment for the son who competes and the son who would be old enough next year. We participate in every tournament we can. We go and encourage our co-op’s NASP team. We would be devastated if we were no longer able to participate or had to scramble to find a team within our county.

- Our archers were so discouraged. They had worked hard over the last several years, and most of our seniors were not able to compete this year. NASP dropped the rule on us right at the start of school. Many kids had already signed up for archery, but we had to tell them they could not compete.

- Our team used to compete with a local school at tournaments until NASP changed their rules. It was very frustrating and disappointing when the changes started taking place.

- Participation in NASP has been a huge blessing to our entire family. To see our son thrive in an environment and to be confident about something he was doing was exuberating. We were able to have a sigh of relief that he had finally found his niche. Unfortunately, that was all taken away with the change of the NASP rules for homeschoolers. The team he was on was forced to dismantle because the coaches and other team members resided in nearby counties. They actually live closer than we do but just in a different county.

- NASP has alienated and extremely limited a vast majority of POTENTIAL archers through their discrimination against home schooled kids!! Especially in light of the huge increase in home school enrollment this past year due to effects of COVID.
It’s certainly not fair that there are so many limitations for our kids to participate in a sport that has PROVEN to be so beneficial to development & even management for ADHD, ADD, mood disorders, and depression, and offers so many collegiate opportunities!

- This new rule doesn’t make any sense. Public schools in my state are allowed to take students from other counties. Additionally, I am a hunter safety educator in my state, and there’s no rule that you can’t participate in a safety course if it’s outside your county.

- I cannot even express the overall disappointment from kids, parents, coaches, and volunteers involved in our homeschool archery program since the changes NASP has made. I have 2 archers that are special needs children and cannot be a part of any other type of team. This team fits them and they are terrific. It was so difficult to explain that they are no longer part of a team and if they chose to participate they would participate only as an individual. It is far greater for these kids to participate as a team and build team camaraderie over just shooting for themselves.

- My homeschool co-op was located in one county, but most of the NASP team was outside of county lines (the majority just about a mile away from the county line). This year all of most of our top archers from the co-op could not compete and it disappointed not only the team but also the archers personally. I do know due to the ruling my two teens and other team members lost interest in shooting. My daughter was praying for years for NASP to get going in the homeschool group and she was highly disappointed when she could not shoot at any competitions. We had momentum and competitions to look forward too. Now, nothing.

As you can see, these responses show that while homeschoolers love NASP, they hate the new rule change. In fact, a number of them have communicated to us that they have left NASP because of this rule change, choosing instead to participate with USA Archery, 4H, CenterShot, or Scholastic 3-D Archery. According to homeschoolers that contacted us, both CenterShot and S3DA have been extremely accommodating to homeschool teams.

Reevaluating the 2020 rule change that has restricted archery options for homeschooled students—in some cases eliminating the only available option—would both enrich the educational experience of homeschool students and advance NASP’s mission to improve “participation in the shooting sports among students.”

I will finish with what one homeschool coach from West Virginia told me. “Our kids loved more than anything to be part of a team, to feel the joy and comradery that came with working together to achieve a goal. NASP has robbed them of that joy.”
We would appreciate an opportunity to work with NASP to fix this problem that has hurt homeschool students and co-ops all over the country. You are welcome to either email me at darren@hslda.org or call us at 540-338-5600. I look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,

Darren A. Jones

Cc: Lisa Fry, Kentucky NASP (link removed)
    NASP Board of Directors