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DATE: January 11, 2021

TO: UME Volunteers

FROM: Jim Hanson, Associate Dean and Associate Director, University of Maryland Extension

RE: New Background Check Policy

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Hanson".

Dear Volunteer,

Volunteers are critical to the mission of the University of Maryland Extension (UME). Volunteer efforts enable UME to extend our reach through numerous hours of service. In doing so, volunteers help make positive impacts on individuals, families and communities.

UME has had a volunteer application and on-boarding process for over 20 years. This process has always included a background check. UME has been studying the current background check process for 2 ½ years. This past year, the following actions occurred:

- 1) the establishment of a volunteer background check taskforce,
- 2) solicitation of feedback from faculty and staff, and
- 3) consultation with other Extension services to understand approaches to this critical issue.

UME administration has determined that a more comprehensive background check policy is needed in order to protect the youth and stakeholder base, UME volunteers, UME programs, and the organization. This policy decision was vetted with the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR), the Director of Human Resources for AGNR and approved by the University of Maryland legal office.

Most UME volunteers will be required to have a commercial criminal background check to continue in their volunteer role in 2021. A commercial criminal background check is a standard in the majority of volunteer programs across the nation and are not designed nor intended to disrespect or to imply mistrust in our volunteers. The new background check policy is a tiered system of background checks. Each tier represents a different level of background check based on the role of the volunteer with the University.

We understand that this change in policy may create questions. Attached you will find an FAQ document that provides details about the policy and changes that may affect your volunteer role. We will continue to provide additional information as our policies and guidelines are finalized. A video training will be offered in January to prepare volunteers for the transition. You may contact Aly Valentine, the Assistant Director of Operations at valenta@umd.edu with questions regarding the policy and/or implementation.

Thank you for your volunteer commitment to UME's vision and mission.