

# Ohio will scrutinize school booster clubs

The Associated Press

DAYTON, Ohio —

A new law means the Ohio Attorney General's Office will be keeping a closer eye on school booster clubs and parent-teacher organizations.

Ohio lawmakers authorized the office in August to require all boosters and PTOs handling more than \$25,000 to provide annual reports, including financial records.

In communities around the state, during the past four years, booster club officials have been charged with embezzlement, theft or misuse of funds intended to benefit kids in their school district. Combined, booster clubs and PTOs around the state manage millions of dollars in assets, officials said.

Assets include money that flows in and out of the club coffers and equipment and property the groups own.

Until now, booster groups and PTOs were exempted from state law that already required registration with the Attorney General's Office by other charitable trusts and nonprofits operating in the state.

But theft of booster funds has become a serious enough issue that the Ohio Attorney General's office pressed to expand the requirement for the groups.

"There are significant assets at risk," office spokeswoman Beth Short told the Dayton Daily News for a story published Tuesday. "The kids and teachers are the ones that suffer when adequate care isn't taken."

The reporting change, authorized by the state legislature Aug. 10, brings Ohio in line with other states taking steps to better scrutinize school support groups. For example, in 2007, Tennessee lawmakers passed a law requiring boosters and other private groups supporting public schools to report annual financial activity and other information to the state treasurer.

Sandra Pfau Englund, a lawyer, and former band booster and PTO president, started Parent Booster USA to assist groups around the country trying to operate successfully and comply with state and federal laws, including the new reporting required in Ohio. Other help is available from governments and organizations, from the IRS to the Ohio High School Athletic Association to the North American Booster Club Association to the Ohio High School Athletic Association.

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