

The Advocate Role on the Safe Church Team

I. The advisory panel process includes the role of a support person to offer emotional support for the claimant and the accused. The same individual does not serve both the claimant and the accused. The support person is important to a claimant and accused so that they do not experience the advisory panel process alone or without support. In addition, the support person can assist the claimant or the accused through the panel process because the support person knows the process.

In some cases, an *advocate* should be available on behalf of the claimant through the advisory panel process. This advocate role is distinct from the *support person role* by the advocacy conducted on behalf of the claimant to various ecclesiastical bodies.

If the claimant prefers an advocate, one aspect of the advocate's role is to offer that support, so the person does not need a support person, too. The accused person, however, will still need a support person. He or she may decline to have a support person present or they may bring a support person of their choosing. Neither the support person nor advocate can be a current or former practicing attorney (cf. II. I).

II. The role of the claimant's advocate within the advisory panel process includes the following:

- A. Assists the claimant to contact the executive committee or the Safe Church Team to request an advisory panel (per the advisory panel guidelines).
- B. Assists the claimant to collect and organize the testimony that supports the allegation and to bring witnesses together who may provide testimony for the panel.
- C. Arranges with the panel chairperson for the transportation, accommodations, and other travel plans as necessary.
- D. Advocates on behalf of the claimant to the panelists, if need be.
- E. Advocates *in the absence of the claimant* in meetings held with the executive committee.
- F. Encourages the executive committee to pursue whether other incidents of misconduct may have occurred.
- G. Advocates *in the absence of the claimant* in the meeting with the consistory or council.
- H. Advocates *in the absence of the claimant* in the classis meeting when the case arises.
- I. Neither an advocate nor a support person may be a present or former practicing attorney. (See note below)

An advocate cannot offer the claimant's written or verbal testimony as required in the advisory panel process. The advocate cannot present testimony regarding specific events. When speaking, the advocate can identify to the panel and to other ecclesiastical bodies the specific harm done to the person by the accused person's misconduct and other dynamics of abuse as need be.

An advocate must be a member of the Christian Reformed Church. An advocate should be knowledgeable about the advisory panel process. An advocate agrees to function in the role of an advocate as defined above.