

Past failure overshadows Scouts' strides in protecting youth from abuse

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I am a lawyer who represents victims of sexual abuse in civil cases, and I have litigated against the Boy Scouts of America. I was pleased to read the Globe's news coverage about the release of the so-called perversion, or confidential, files, the Scouts' secret dossiers on thousands of accused molesters.

While the Scouts have made strides in recent years to protect members from sexual abuse, the organization's pernicious history of burying abuse and its failure to enact rules designed to prevent abuse are shameful. I was therefore surprised at the tone of the Nov. 3 editorial, "Boy Scouts covered up abuse, but also made crucial reforms," which praised the Scouts for keeping the files for "more than 80 years" and for an "admirable awareness of the need to protect youths from predators."

The editorial fails to grasp the larger points. The Scouts delayed implementing rules prohibiting scout leaders from sleeping in tents with boys and rules ensuring that two adults would go on camping trips, even when the Scouts knew that abuse was more likely to occur when a sole male went on overnight trips with boys.

Further, the desire to keep the files and their existence secret was an effort to protect the institution's brand instead of trying to protect other children from being harmed, much like abuses within the Catholic Church and at Penn State University.

If only these institutions had the strength to follow the words of Louis Brandeis, who stated that "sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants."

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