Since its founding in 1989, FIRST Team numbers have grown dramatically year after year. FIRST programs cover the globe and currently engage 350,000 Team members ranging in age from 6 to 18 and older. If you have been involved with FIRST for even a short time, you know that a commitment to safety is one of our core values. In order to help protect every FIRST Team member from injury and to support all those working with FIRST to live up to our values, FIRST is developing a much-strengthened Youth Protection Program (YPP), including a clear position on preventing child abuse.

The goals of the YPP are to reduce the risks of injury and maintain uniformly high safety standards across all FIRST programs, while making these standards easy to adopt at little or no cost to Teams. The YPP is built on proven youth protection practices from colleague youth-serving organizations, nationally recognized experts, and some of our most experienced Coaches and Mentors.

I am authorizing the issuance of the YPP documents today, to be effective May 1, 2014. That said, I realize that many Teams may already be following these practices or will be able to adopt them now, and I encourage them to do so. The requirements of YPP are few, and the recommendations numerous. This distinction is meant to allow Team Coaches/Mentors to continue to rely on safety policies and procedures that already exist in their schools, while ensuring that all Team Coaches/Mentors follow effective youth protection practices, even if their hosting school/organization does not provide them. Note also that the YPP refers specifically to Teams in the United States and Canada; however, Teams outside of the United States and Canada are encouraged to follow the standards set by the YPP.

FIRST Headquarters will provide information and support to assist Teams in adopting the YPP. Lee Doucette, our Youth Protection Program Manager will maintain an open forum for questions at safetyFIRST@usfirst.org, a frequently asked questions blog on the FIRST website or you may call Lee directly at 1-800-871-8326, Ext. 250.

Thank you for all that you do to bring the FIRST experience to your Team members and to your communities. I know our Youth Protection Program will help you provide the students with a safe and rewarding experience.

Donald E. Bossi

President, FIRST®