In 2007, Pennsylvania public schools started requiring all volunteers in its schools to annually pass three background checks: the Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Records, the Federal Criminal History Record, and the Child Abuse History Clearance. The sum of these checks comes out to $56 per year. Several issues soon arose. The first is safety; to what extent do background checks prevent and deter criminal behaviors in volunteers? Are there people of certain demographics that are more likely to have criminal backgrounds? The second is volunteerism. Is volunteerism stunted because of the background check process, or is it as efficient as it could be in balancing volunteerism with safety? Third, how efficiently are these background checks being processed? This includes the early stages of instructing volunteers to submit the forms, receiving processed checks and storing them in secure spaces. Finally, why do the three checks cost as much or little as they do?

With these questions in mind, this thesis analyzes to what extent background check practices and policies are aligned with practicality and safety. The primary claim is that although background checks are a significant hindrance to volunteerism, universities and their service centers are doing little to assist in the process in terms of both information and financial support. Sub-claims include that background checks’ efficacies are unproven and merely illusions of safety. Furthermore, many unnecessary and duplicate checks are being conducted by volunteer groups.