

PRESBYTERY OF SHENANDOAH
POLICY ON BACKGROUND CHECKS
Approved by Presbytery August 26, 2017

I. POLICY

It is the policy of the Presbytery of Shenandoah that background checks **shall** be conducted for all new Ministers of the Word and Sacrament serving in congregations or validated ministries of the presbytery, clergy of denominations in full communion with the PCUSA, members of the presbytery who receive a new call or appointment to a congregation in the presbytery, leaders of new worshiping communities, Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE), and presbytery staff. In addition, this policy applies to volunteers who chaperone presbytery-sponsored events for persons under the age of 18, lead and/or work with presbytery-sponsored activities with vulnerable adults, and those who have sole financial responsibility over any presbytery funds. The purpose of this policy is to increase protection for congregations, as well as their children, youth, and vulnerable adults, from those who have a history of criminal or dangerous activity.

The Pastor Nominating Committees (PNC) of churches in transition shall have the responsibility for providing information on the requirement and process to pastor candidates. The presbytery office shall have the responsibility for assuring that other pastors seeking membership in the Presbytery of Shenandoah are given notice of and process for background checks, when that is appropriate. The presbytery office, or designated staff, shall have the responsibility for obtaining background checks on all employees prior to employment, CREs prior to commissioning, and volunteers prior to the volunteer activity, as well as all leaders in new worshiping communities as part of their preparation work with the Committee on New Congregational Development (CNCD).

II. INFORMATION REQUESTED IN A BACKGROUND CHECK

A background check is a review of available records, both public and confidential, relative to possible history of criminal activity and other activity that could be dangerous to congregations and individuals. Background checks in the Presbytery of Shenandoah occur in four ways:

- a. The Personal Information Form (PIF) provides one way in which sexual misconduct is disclosed and shared between presbyteries.
- b. In the Presbyterian- Presbyterian reference check, knowledge of criminal misconduct is shared between executives.
- c. All requests for reports are subject to the signed authorization of the individual.
- d. A formal background check shall include:
 - *Social Security Trace
 - Nationwide Criminal History check
 - Sexual Offender Registry check
 - County and State Wide Criminal History check
 - Verification of the Educational Credentials
 - Motor Vehicle Record Check
- e. When a pastor's Terms of Call include a loan, a Credit Report shall be requested.
- f. Statewide reports will be requested for all states in which the individual has lived during the preceding five years.
- g. Additional optional background check components are available at the request of a PNC or employing agency relative to individualized responsibilities for a pastor, staff, or volunteer.

** A social security number is required for a background check. A trace of the social security number provides information on localities in which an individual has lived and applicable states/counties in which to check records. The social security number will be used only for this purpose.*

III. PERSONS WHO WILL RECEIVE BACKGROUND CHECKS

The Presbytery will conduct all checks before a call is issued or employment begins for:

- a. All teaching elder members new to the Presbytery.

- b. All teaching elders and CRE'S of the Presbytery who receive a new call or an appointment as Supply Pastor or Interim Pastor, if the time interval since the last background check is five or more years.
- c. All ordained and non-ordained leaders of new worshipping communities who have not had a background check in the last five years.
- d. All laypersons who chaperone Presbytery events for those under the age of 18, who have not had a background check through the Presbytery within the past 5 years.
- e. All staff of the Presbytery shall have a background check and those having financial responsibility shall have a Credit Report requested if not done for previous five years.
- f. A statement that background checks shall be conducted should a call be issued is to be included in one of the narrative question responses on the MIF.

IV. WHERE REPORTS ARE HELD AND WHO HAS ACCESS TO THEM

The Presbytery shall be responsible for maintaining and retaining all records and reports related to background checks for all individuals for whom they are received for a period of 20 years.

V. PROCESS OF BACKGROUND CHECKS AND HOW THE INFORMATION WILL BE USED

- a. In the case of a church in transition, when the PNC decides upon its candidate, the PNC shall notify the General Presbyter/Stated Clerk, or a designee, to initiate the background check process. The report is returned to the General Presbyter/Stated Clerk. If the report is clear, the PNC is notified and the CPT can proceed to its examination of the candidate for acceptance of the call.

Should there be a negative result, the following *shall occur*:

- 1. The Presbyter, or his/her designee, shall contact the individual to discuss the matter.
 - 2. If the Presbyter/designee is not satisfied with the individual's explanation, the concern will be referred to a group consisting of the Presbyter, chairs of the Committee on Relational Ministry (CRM), Committee on Pastoral Transition (CPT) and the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). This group will meet with the individual to discuss the concern.
 - 3. If concerns are not satisfied, this group shall recommend to the PNC restrictions or may recommend termination of the call process.
 - 4. The Presbyter shall file a report in the pastor member's file in the Presbytery office when any restrictions are set for the individual.
- b. For other teaching elders coming into the presbytery, leaders of new worshipping communities, staff of presbytery, and volunteers it is the responsibility of the presbytery office, to complete the background check process. **A negative result in a background check shall be reviewed with the individual prior to any action.**

VI. RESPONSIBILITY FOR COST

- a. The cost for teaching elders shall be assumed by the calling church or employing agency.
- b. The cost for New Worshipping Community leaders shall be assumed by the CNCD.
- c. CREs shall have background checks prior to acceptance for training and the Presbytery shall assume responsibility for payment.
- d. The Presbytery shall pay for all background checks conducted on its staff and lay volunteers.

Churches in Shenandoah Presbytery are encouraged to require background checks on all staff, and lay persons, who chaperone or provide leadership for anyone under the age of 18 years. Requirements of many liability insurance policies have an expectation of background checks.