

Presbytery of Philadelphia
Committee on Ministry
Policy on Background Checks
Ministers, Commissioned Lay Pastors, Candidates for Ministry
Approved by COM: September 1, 2011
Approved by CPM: September 9, 2011

1. Purpose:

- a. To uphold Standards of Ethical Conduct – 210th General Assembly 1998.
- b. To discover and verify background information provided by all clergy seeking to become members of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, Commissioned Lay Pastors, and Candidates for Ministry.
- c. To be one component in the decision making process of COM, CPM, a PNC, Presbytery or employing body.
- d. To strengthen the risk management practices of clergy, congregations and the Presbytery.
- e) To obtain a financial history that demonstrates a person’s ability to manage money responsibly.

2. Required Background Checks: (Dating back 7 years)

- a. Criminal Record
- b. Employment History
- c. Motor Vehicle Record
- d. Credit History

3. Person Authorized to Order Background Checks and Review Reports:

Executive Presbyter or the moderator/s of the Committee on Ministry(COM) or the moderator of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry(CPM) [“Presbytery Reviewer”].

4. Timing of Background Checks:

- a. Clergy and Lay Pastors seeking a position as a pastoral professional in a member church
 - i. Background Checks will be conducted before a person is invited to candidate for a particular congregation or a person is appointed to a particular congregation.
 - ii. A signed authorization/release form must be received from the person before the Background Checks are initiated.
- b. Clergy seeking membership (Active and HR), but not in an installed position
 - i. Background Checks will be conducted before a person appears for the membership examination. A signed authorization/release form must be received from the person before the Background Checks are

initiated.

c. Inquirers/Candidates under Care

- i. Background Checks will be conducted before a person appears on the floor of presbytery to move from Inquirer to Candidate

5. Cost of the Background Checks: The cost will become an expense item of the COM or the CPM Budget.
6. Procedure if the Background Check Reports Discloses No Relevant Information or Inconsistencies: The Presbytery reviewer will notify either the COM moderator/s, the PNC/Search Committee Chair or the CPM moderator and the process continues.
7. Presbytery Review of the Background Check Reports: The Presbytery reviewer will consider the results of the executive-to-executive reference check and will examine the Background Check Reports, the authorization and release form and the person's Personal Information Form(PIF) to determine the existence of any of the following factors:
 - a) A pending criminal or civil proceeding of any kind;
 - b) A conviction involving Sexual Misconduct;
 - c) A pending ecclesiastical disciplinary proceeding;
 - d) A judgment or act of censure entered in an ecclesiastical disciplinary proceeding;
 - f) An alternative form of resolution agreement approved by a Permanent Judicial Commission in the PCUSA or equivalent body of another church resolving an ecclesiastical disciplinary proceeding;
 - g) An inconsistency between the Background Check reports and the educational, employment, and criminal background information provided by the person; and
 - h. A credit history that shows a bankruptcy, pattern of failing to make payments on time, or other patterns of behavior that demonstrate poor financial management practices.
8. Procedure If the Background Check Reports Discloses Relevant Information or Inconsistencies:
 - a) Notice to Person. If the Background Check reports or an executive-to-executive reference check discloses the existence of any of the information or inconsistencies noted in Section 7, the Presbytery reviewer will promptly contact the person and inform him/her. A copy of the Background Check reports will be provided to the person with a "Received" receipt included.
 - b. Response from the Person. Within 10 days of the Presbytery obtaining the "Received" receipt, the person will deliver to the Presbytery reviewer a letter confirming or denying the information contained in the reports, along with any evidence relevant to support the person's position.
 - c. Continuation of the CPM, COM, PNC/Search Processes. Upon receipt of

the person's letter and supporting evidence, the Executive Presbyter and/or the Presbytery reviewer **in communication with** the CPM chair or the COM chair/s **in coordination with their respective committees or** the PNC/Search Committee will determine whether the person's process or candidacy will continue based on its consideration of all relevant factors, including, but not limited to the following:

- i. The nature and seriousness of the matter;
- ii. The extent to which employment by the church/organization might offer the opportunity to engage in similar activity;
- iii. The time elapsed since the person's last engagement in the activity that is the subject of the investigation;
- iv. Evidence of a sincere effort to remediate the matter.

9. Maintenance of Background Check Reports that Discloses Relevant Information or Inconsistencies. A copy of all reports will be given to the person and a copy will be maintained in a locked file within the Presbytery Office. They will not be made available for any purpose other than that which is described above.

This document was prepared based on information from the following:

1. Standards of Ethical Conduct – General Assembly 1998
2. Hudson River Presbytery – Clergy and Employee Background Check Policy – 2008
3. National Capital Presbytery – Background Check Policy – 2002
4. Presbytery of Greater Atlanta – Policy on Background Checks for Clergy – 2007

Education Opportunity Available: The Board of Pensions offers the “Getting in Shape Fiscally” educational event several times per year in various areas.