1	OVERTURE 16 from Warrior Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 3	"Amend BCO 13-6, 21-4, 24-1 to Require Background Checks"
3 4	Whereas, the qualifications for elders and deacons include being "above reproach" (1 Tim.
5	3:2 and Titus 1:7), "self-controlled" (1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:8), "not violent but gentle"
6	(1 Tim. 3:3)," not quick-tempered" (Titus 1:7), and "prove themselves blameless"
7	(1 Tim. 3:10); and
8	
9	Whereas, the qualifications for elders include being "well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim.
10 11	3:7); and
11	Whereas, the qualification of every believer is to "keep your conduct among the Gentiles
12	honorable" (1 Pet. 2:12); and
14	
15	Whereas, our confession warns leaders against the "careless exposing, or leaving [those in
16	their care] to wrong, temptation, and danger" (WLC 130); and
17	
18	Whereas, under the Book of Church Order church courts are to perform "a careful
19 20	examination" of church officers including as to their "personal character" (21-4.c; 24- 1.a) and "Christian experience" (13-6); and
20 21	1.a) and Christian experience (13-0), and
21	Whereas, the report of the Ad Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault to
23	the 49th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (the "DASA
24	Report") implores that "Churches protect their members with policies that take into
25	consideration the most vulnerable in the congregation," including "Presbyteries
26	enacting policies to require background checks and abuse training for all ordinands
27	and transfers, and policies to protect whistleblowers against retribution" (M49GA
28	[2022], 965, 965 n.11) (See attachment for possible examples of such policies); and
29 30	Whereas, the DASA Report further recommends, "Candidates for the gospel ministry and
31	others employed for spiritual oversight (Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, etc.)
32	should be examined carefully to determine their godly character. Presbyteries and
33	Sessions are encouraged to carefully investigate a candidate for leadership roles
34	including but not limited to the candidate's knowledge of theology. Background
35	checks, social media checks, and careful reference checks should be used to screen for
36	abusive leadership" (<i>ibid.</i> , 1183); and
37	
38	Whereas, the 42nd General Assembly resolved that churches prevent types of abuse "by $arranging staff and value tages" (M42CA [2014], 50); and$
39 40	screening staff and volunteers" (M42GA [2014], 59); and
40 41	Whereas, the 42nd General Assembly resolved that churches "must cooperate with those
42	authorities as they 'bear the sword' to punish those who do evil 'in such an effectual
43	manner as that no person be suffered to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or
44	injury to any other person whatsoever" (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14; WCF 23.3)"
45	(<i>ibid</i> .); and

1 2	Whereas, our confession's instruction that "there are some circumstances concerning government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be
3	ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence" (WCF 1.6) includes the wisdom
4	and prudence of background checks; and
5	
6	Whereas, our confession does not require submission to unlawful or unbiblical standards
7	(WCF 23.4) nor thereby require the government's involvement in the business of the
8	church (WCF 23.3); and
9	
10	Whereas, presbyteries and sessions of the PCA are called to order and conduct all trials and
11	examinations of candidates for church office utilizing their own discretion and wisdom
12	due to the authority and right of their office (BCO 13, 21, and 24);
13	
14	Therefore, be it resolved that <i>BCO</i> 13-6 be amended by the addition of a second paragraph:
15	
16	
17	A Presbytery shall order and review a background check on each candidate,
18	administered under the specific rules and policies of the Presbytery, as part of its
19 20	examination of the candidate's Christian experience (if seeking admission from
20	another Presbytery in the Presbyterian Church in America) or acquaintance with
21	experiential religion (if seeking admission from other denominations [see $BCO 21$ -
22 23	<u>4.c.(1)(a)]). The candidate shall be permitted to address the content of the background check.</u>
23 24	<u>Dackground check.</u>
24 25	Be it further resolved that BCO 21-4.c.(1) be amended by adding a final unnumbered
25 26	paragraph to the subsection:
20 27	paragraph to the subsection.
28	21-4. c.(1)
20 29	A Presbytery shall order and review a background check on each candidate,
30	administered under the specific rules and policies of the Presbytery, as part of its
31	examination of a candidate's experiential religion (BCO 21-4.c.(1)(a)). The
32	candidate shall be permitted to address the content of the background check.
33	
34	So that the unnumbered paragraphs will read
35	"A Presbytery may accept a seminary degree which includes study in the original
36	languages in lieu of an oral examination in the original languages.
37	
38	A Presbytery shall order and review a background check on each candidate,
39	administered under the specific rules and policies of the Presbytery, as part of its
40	examination of a candidate's experiential religion (BCO 21-4.c.(1)(a)). The
41	candidate shall be permitted to address the content of the background check."
42	
43	Be it further resolved that BCO 24-1 be amended by inserting a second unnumbered
44	paragraph after subsection e and before the unnumbered paragraph that begins
15	"Notwithstanding the above"

45 "Notwithstanding the above..."

24-1.e. . . .

A Session shall order and review a background check on each candidate,
administered under the specific rules and policies of the Session, as part of its
examination of a candidate's Christian experience (BCO 24-1.a.). The candidate
shall be permitted to address the content of the background check.
Be it further resolved that Presbyteries and Sessions are hereby encouraged to adopt policies
for conducting mandatory background checks on every candidate for office.
Adopted by Warrior Presbytery at its stated meeting, January 23, 2024.
Attested by /s/ TE Michael Perry, stated clerk

Attachment

Sample Policies for Presbyteries and Sessions

The following is an example of a policy that could be adopted or amended by a Presbytery to adhere with local laws and regulations:

Prior to any candidate coming before the Presbytery for examination for ordination or transfer of credentials, the [insert committee name] Committee shall order a background check on the candidate ordinarily at the cost of the Presbytery. The report of the background check shall only be received by the Committee in executive session. The candidate shall be furnished with a copy of the background check and given the opportunity to respond to any content in the background check. The Committee shall report to the Presbytery (1) that it has received the report of the background check, and no concerns were raised; (2) that it has received the report of the background check, and potential concerns were satisfactorily explained by the candidate without reflecting negatively on his *BCO* 13-6 or 21-4.c.(1)(a) examination; or (3) that it has received the report of the background check, and potential concerns should be weighed by the Presbytery in the candidate's *BCO* 13-6 or 21-4.c.(1)(a) examination. Any details of possible concerns found in the background check may be disclosed only to the Presbytery and/or the Session of the church calling the candidate when in executive session. Such details may be disclosed outside the Committee only at the Committee's discretion or upon the request of the Presbytery or Session properly seeking the information.

The following is an example of a policy that could be adopted by a Session:

Prior to any candidate coming before the Session for examination for the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon, the Session shall order a background check on the candidate at the cost of the Session. The report of the background check shall only be received by the Session in executive session. The candidate shall be furnished with a copy of the background check and given the opportunity to respond to any content in the background check. Information learned should ordinarily only be considered as part of the Session's examination of the candidate's personal character under *BCO* 24-1.a. and should not ordinarily be disclosed to the congregation.