

1 **OVERTURE 24** from the Presbytery of South Texas (to CCB, OC)
2 “Amend BCO 13-6, 21-4, and 24-1 to Require Background Checks for Church Office”
3

4 [Editorial Note: This overture is similar to Overtures 6, 16, 17, and 23.]
5

6 **Whereas**, the qualifications for elders and deacons include being “above reproach” (1 Tim.
7 3:2 and Titus 1:7), “self-controlled” (1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:8), “not violent but gentle”
8 (1 Tim. 3:3), “not ... quick-tempered” (Titus 1:7), and “prove themselves blameless”
9 (1 Tim. 3:10); and
10

11 **Whereas**, the qualifications for elders include being “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim.
12 3:7); and
13

14 **Whereas**, the qualification of every believer is to “keep your conduct among the Gentiles
15 honorable” (1 Pet. 2:12); and
16

17 **Whereas**, our confession warns leaders against the “careless exposing, or leaving [those in
18 their care] to wrong, temptation, and danger” (*WLC* 130); and
19

20 **Whereas**, under the *Book of Church Order* church courts are to perform “a careful
21 examination” of church officers including as to their “personal character” (21-4.c; 24-
22 1.a) and “Christian experience” (13-6); and
23

24 **Whereas**, the report of the Ad Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault to
25 the 49th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (the “DASA
26 Report”) implores that “Churches protect their members with policies that take into
27 consideration the most vulnerable in the congregation,” including “Presbyteries
28 enacting policies to require background checks and abuse training for all ordinands
29 and transfers, and policies to protect whistleblowers against retribution” (*M49GA*
30 [2022], 965, 965 n.11) (See attachment for possible examples of such policies); and
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32 **Whereas**, the DASA Report further recommends, “Candidates for the gospel ministry and
33 others employed for spiritual oversight (Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, etc.)
34 should be examined carefully to determine their godly character. Presbyteries and
35 Sessions are encouraged to carefully investigate a candidate for leadership roles
36 including but not limited to the candidate’s knowledge of theology. *Background*
37 *checks*, social media checks, and careful reference checks should be used to screen for
38 abusive leadership” (*ibid.*, 1183); and
39

40 **Whereas**, the 42nd General Assembly resolved that churches prevent types of abuse “by
41 screening staff and volunteers” (*M42GA* [2014], 59); and
42

43 **Whereas**, the 42nd General Assembly resolved that churches “must cooperate with those
44 authorities as they ‘bear the sword’ to punish those who do evil ‘in such an effectual
45 manner as that no person be suffered . . . to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or

1 injury to any other person whatsoever” (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14; *WCF* 23.3)”
2 (*ibid.*); and

3 **Whereas**, our confession’s instruction that “there are some circumstances concerning ...
4 government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be
5 ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence” (*WCF* 1.6) includes the wisdom
6 and prudence of background checks; and

7
8 **Whereas**, our confession does not require submission to unlawful or unbiblical standards
9 (*WCF* 23.4) nor thereby require the government’s involvement in the business of the
10 church (*WCF* 23.3); and

11
12 **Whereas**, presbyteries and sessions of the PCA are called to order and conduct all trials and
13 examinations of candidates for church office utilizing their own discretion and wisdom
14 due to the authority and right of their office (*BCO* 13, 21, and 24);

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16 **Therefore, be it resolved** that *BCO* 13-6 be amended by adding a final unnumbered paragraph
17 to the end of the subsection:

18
19 **13-6. . . .**

20 A Presbytery shall order and review a background check on each candidate,
21 administered under the specific rules and policies of the Presbytery, as part of its
22 examination of the candidate’s Christian experience (if seeking admission from
23 another Presbytery in the Presbyterian Church in America) or acquaintance with
24 experiential religion (if seeking admission from other denominations [see *BCO* 21-
25 4.c.(1)(a)]. The candidate shall be permitted to address the content of the background
26 check.

27
28 **Be it further resolved** that *BCO* 21-4.c.(1) be amended by adding a final unnumbered
29 paragraph at the end of the subsection:

30
31 **21-4.c.(1) . . .**

32 A Presbytery shall order and review a background check on each candidate,
33 administered under the specific rules and policies of the Presbytery, as part of its
34 examination of a candidate’s experiential religion (*BCO* 21-4.c.(1)(a)). The candidate
35 shall be permitted to address the content of the background check.

36
37 **Be it further resolved** that *BCO* 24-1 be amended by inserting a second unnumbered
38 paragraph immediately after subsection “e” and before the unnumbered paragraph that begins,
39 “Notwithstanding the above . . .”:

40
41 **24-1.e. . . .**

42 A Session shall order and review a background check on each candidate, administered
43 under the specific rules and policies of the Session, as part of its examination of a
44 candidate’s Christian experience (*BCO* 24-1.a). The candidate shall be permitted to
45 address the content of the background check.

1 **Be it further resolved** that Presbyteries and Sessions are hereby encouraged to adopt policies
2 for conducting mandatory background checks on every candidate for office.

3

4 *Adopted by South Texas Presbytery at its stated meeting, January 28, 2024*

5 *Attested by /s/ RE Barry McBee, 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.