

1 **OVERTURE 22** from the Pacific Northwest Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 “Amend *BCO* 20-3, 24-3 and 25-1 to clarify "Regular Standing" re minimum voting
3 age”
4

5 **A. Be it resolved** that *BCO* 20-3, 24-3, and *BCO* 25-1 be amended as shown below.
6 Proposed additions are indicated by underlining.

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8 20-3. When a congregation is convened for the election of a pastor ... All communing
9 members in good and regular standing, but no others, are entitled to vote in the
10 churches to which they are respectively attached. (cf. *BCO* 25-1)
11

12 24-3. All communing members in good and regular standing, but no others, are entitled
13 to vote in the election of church officers in the churches to which they respectively
14 belong. A majority vote of those present is required for election. (cf. *BCO* 25-1)
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16 25-1. The congregation consists of all the communing members of a particular church,
17 and they only are entitled to vote. A congregation may establish a rule setting a
18 minimum voting age (regular standing), but it must be adopted by a two-thirds (2/3)
19 majority at a congregational meeting that is called with at least 30 days' notice. (cf.
20 *BCO* 20-3, 24-3)
21

22 **B. Be it also resolved** that if GA adopts this, or an amended version, the Stated Clerk
23 will make this full Rationale available when the Amendment Ballot is sent to
24 Presbyteries.
25

26 **Rationale** - The need for this Overture arises from an SJC Decision in March 2024, where,
27 by a vote of 15-5, the SJC ruled that the *BCO* does not permit a congregation to set a minimum
28 voting age.¹ This Overture seeks to permit such. It argues that such has historically been
29 common in American Presbyterianism. It's part of what was, and is, meant by "regular"
30 standing. The *Psiaki* Decision did not define what the word "regular" means in the phrase
31 "good and regular standing" and this Overture seeks to treat it as it has historically been
32 understood. When the PCA was formed in 1973 it adopted the PCUS *BCO* of 1925. Minor
33 communicants did not vote in 1925, as they were not regarded as being in "regular" standing.
34 Our *BCO* 25-1 and 24-3 remain unchanged from 1925. The sentence above in *BCO* 20-3
35 remains unchanged from the PCUS *BCO* of 1879.²
36

37 This Overture’s rationale provides many and varied arguments for why the PCA should allow
38 such freedom, which is generally described below in Robert's Rules.
39

¹ Case 2023-11: *Complaint of Psiaki v. Pacific Northwest* (M51GA, p. 877). This included the SJC Decision, a Concurring Opinion, three Dissenting Opinions, and an Objection (34 pages total).
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1o6nAccxz-IkLBHVNIL_v7d_A7YDPyURK/view?usp=sharing

² *BCO* 20-3 = PCUS 1879, VI, §3-4. *BCO* 24-3 = PCUS 1925, XXVI, §145.
BCO 25-1 = PCUS 1925, XXVII, §152. The 1879 PCUS Book used "all communicants" instead of "all communing members" for the provision in *BCO* 20-3. <https://www.pcahistory.org/bco/index.html>

1 Some organized societies define additional classes of "membership" that do not entail all of
2 these rights. Whenever the term member is used in this book [RONR], it refers to full
3 participating membership in the assembly, unless otherwise specified. Such members are also
4 described as "voting members" when it is necessary to make a distinction. (RONR (12th ed.)
5 1:4)

6
7 If this is Amendment is enacted, *no church* will be required to change *any* current practice. It
8 simply adds an option for churches that believe a minimum voting age is prudent. Further,
9 while enactment might increase the average age of minors who vote, it should not have any
10 effect on the average age when covenant children are admitted to the Lord's Supper (unless a
11 Session is unreasonably delaying communion until a child has the maturity to vote.)

12
13 In the pages that follow are many reasons why this Overture should be adopted.

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|----|-------------------------------------|--|
| 14 | 1. Scripture and the "DEA" | 11. PCA Polity Differences |
| 15 | 2. Good and "Regular" Standing | 12. De Facto Minimum Age |
| 16 | 3. PCUS Allowance for Voting Age | 13. Church Corporations |
| 17 | 4. 1982 Reception of RPCES | 14. <i>BCO</i> Preliminary Principle 6 |
| 18 | 5. 2024 <i>Psiaki v. Pacific NW</i> | 15. Other Voting Restrictions? |
| 19 | 6. No Conflict with BCO 6-4 | 16. No Change to Pby/GA Representation |
| 20 | 7. Common Grace & Societal Rules | 17. No Change to Judicial Rights |
| 21 | 8. Status Quo | 18. Related Considerations |
| 22 | 9. 1996-1997 Strong Support | 19. Further Reading |
| 23 | 10. 2000 Pittsburgh Overture | |
| 24 | | |
| 25 | | |

26 As one considers these many arguments, it's important to understand that disagreement with
27 some does not invalidate the persuasive power of the others.

28 29 **1. Scripture and the "Discernment Equivalency Assertion"**

30
31 Some maintain that if a child has the discernment necessary to be admitted to the Lord's
32 Supper, he thereby has the discernment necessary to vote on *any* church matter (i.e., what
33 we'll call the Discernment Equivalency Assertion or DEA). However, this view lacks
34 advocacy among the churchmen most responsible for developing Presbyterian polity.³ These
35 consistently find rational and Scriptural grounds for limiting church suffrage to communicants
36 with adult maturity, self-sovereignty, and ability to commit and contribute to the local church.

³ Alexander T. McGill, *Church Government: A Treatise* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1888), 127-136. Cf., Samuel Rutherford, *Due Right of Presbyteries* (London: Printed by E. Griffin for Richard Whittaker and Andrew Crook), 38-39, 201, 204. George Gillespie, George Gillespie, *Miscellaneous Questions* (Edinburgh: Gedeon Lithgow, 1649), 24. Thomas Smyth, *Manual for the Use of the Members of the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston* (Jenkins & Hussey, 1838), 104-107, 121. William Cunningham, *Discussions on Church Principles: Popish, Erastian, Presbyterian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1863), 290-291. Stuart Robinson & Thomas E. Peck, "What are the Constituent Elements of the Church of God, as Organized and Visible?" in *The Presbyterian Critic and Monthly Review*, Dec 1855, 566-573. Charles Hodge, "Who May Vote in the Election of Pastor," in *The Church and Its Polity* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879), 244-246.

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a. *Adult Understanding*—Jesus tells us that minors can, at some point prior to adulthood, make a genuine profession of faith in Him (Matt. 18:6; Mk. 9:42). And yet in the same breath He warns His disciples that believing minors are especially capable of being led astray, as they retain a particular degree of naivety. Although they might be sufficiently discerning to partake of sacramental meals (Ex. 12:26-32; Lk. 2:41-47), their relative lack of wisdom requires that they remain under the unique tutelage and discipline of parents (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:7; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4). Thus, *BCO* 28-1 affirms that even after becoming communicants, “the spiritual nurture, instruction and training of the children of the Church are committed by God primarily to their parents.”

- Prov. 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. (ESV here and below.)
- Prov. 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.
- 1 Cor. 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.
- 1 Cor. 14:20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

To discern that a prospective church officer possesses careful discretion; courage to take difficult stands; excellent household management skills; empathy to comfort the downcast; etc. may, in the wise judgment of a church, require greater understanding than belongs to minors. Most would probably also agree there is a difference between the ability of children to understand the Gospel (*BCO* 57-2) and their ability to understand things like church debt, elder qualification, dissolution of TE/RE calls, and denominational affiliation.

Some have, nevertheless, argued that if minors are qualified to make the most consequential life-decision of receiving Christ as Savior, they are necessarily qualified to make decisions of lesser consequence, such as choosing church officers.⁴ This line of reasoning entails a *non sequitur*. The *positive consequences* of accepting Jesus Christ are surely greater than that involved in choosing a particular man for office. The former procures eternal life, the latter a particular officer for a limited season. However, the potentially *negative ramifications* of selecting an officer are always greater than those involved in accepting Christ as Lord. Whereas Christ cannot sin against His church (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15), officers can. Whereas Christ cannot prevaricate, would-be officers can. Hence, it requires a greater level of discernment to decipher the character of the latter than the former (Matt. 7:15ff.; 24:24; 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15; 1 Thess. 5:19-21; 1 John 4:1ff.; 2 Pet. 2:1ff.; Rev. 13:11). Analogously, even though admission to the Lord’s Supper and

⁴ Morton Smith, for example, understood PCA *BCO* 24-3 to confer suffrage to minor communicants, and he suggests as its likely rationale something along these lines. Smith, *Commentary on the PCA Book of Church Order* (Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press, 2007), 257. However, the original (1879) authors of the language retained in *BCO* 24-3 do not correlate the understanding necessary to be communed with that necessary to vote in congregational meetings.

1 right to marry must both follow reaching “years of discretion” (*BCO* 28-3; 54-1), none
2 suppose that the age at which one may be communed is identical with that at which he
3 may enter into a marriage covenant. The *BCO* recognizes that the “age and intelligence”
4 necessary to testify in a church court may be greater than that necessary to participate in
5 the Lord’s Supper:
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7 35-1. All persons of *proper age* and intelligence are competent witnesses,
8 except such as do not believe in the existence of God, or a future state of
9 rewards and punishments. Either party has the right to challenge a witness
10 whom he believes to be incompetent, and the court shall examine and decide
11 upon his competency.
12

- 13 b. *Adult Self-Sovereignty*—The demands of the Fifth Commandment (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16;
14 Lev. 19:3; Matt. 15:4; 19:19; Eph. 6:2-4) supply strong grounds for doubting the propriety
15 of minors voting in church meetings. The specific nature and degree to which minors are
16 required to submit to parents renders it questionable that they may assert their voting rights
17 against parental prohibitions or exercise them in contradiction to how parents instruct them
18 vote. It is reasonable, therefore, for congregations to limit voting to adults, with a view to
19 neither (a) encouraging minors to influence their church independently of parental
20 guidance; nor (b) effectively granting parents the ability to wield multiple votes, by
21 requiring their minors to second their perspective in all matters. Of course, minors may
22 continue to exert an influence on congregational decisions in consultation with parents by
23 whom they are well-represented.
24

25 Notably, a communing minor's lack of independence has also been recognized in judicial
26 cases. In Case 2002-5: *Plowman v. Philadelphia*, a Session declared a mother
27 automatically contumacious for "refusing to force" her 14 and 16-year-old communing
28 daughters to testify at trial "even though they had been duly cited by the Session." The
29 Session suspended the mother from the sacraments, but did not censure the communing
30 minors for failing to obey the citation. (*BCO* 35-14) ⁵
31

32 *BCO* 35-3 was revised in 2023 to provide an option to treat minors differently than adults
33 when testifying, even if the minor is a communing member and even if not a victim:
34

35 35-3. A court may, at the request of either party, or at its own initiative, make
36 reasonable accommodation to prevent in-person contact with the accused: ...

37 (c.) In all cases where such accommodation has been made,
38 videoconference testimony by witnesses under the age of 18 shall be taken by
39 written interrogatory to be read to the witness by a person appointed by the
40 court in accordance with the applicable provisions of *BCO* 35-11.
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- 42 c. *Adult Commitment*—In the Old Covenant, the only unambiguous parties involved in
43 formally selecting (or reciprocating God’s selection of) ecclesiastical and civil leaders

⁵ The Case was largely decided on procedural grounds, but the SJC was silent on whether a Session needed parental permission to cite communicant minors to testify. (*M32GA*, p. 62)

1 were adults (Num. 8:9-10, 14 with Lev. 9:1; cf. Deut. 17:14-16 with 1 Sam. 8:4-9; 2 Sam.
 2 5:3; 1 Chron. 12:38; etc.). There existed, therefore, a strong correlation between the body
 3 of electors and those adults who especially bore the responsibility to support, materially,
 4 both the ministry (Ex. 30:12-14; 38:26; Num. 18:8-32) and the civil government (1 Sam.
 5 8:11ff.). Since the same burden to support for the ministry exists today (Luke 10:7; 1 Cor.
 6 9:7-1; 8; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:22), and no passage requires that minors be granted voting
 7 privileges, it is reasonable for churches to follow the only Biblical pattern, confine voting
 8 to those adults who may generally be expected to underwrite the ministry. This policy
 9 does not deny that minors participate in the sacrificial burden of supporting the church
 10 through the faithful contributions of their parents. Instead, it achieves consistency,
 11 recognizing that the same minors may also be represented in congregational voting
 12 through their parents.

13
 14 Many TEs, REs, and the churches whom they represent are not persuaded by the
 15 Discernment Equivalency Assertion. And preventing those churches from setting a
 16 reasonable voting age will logically require them to make one of the two undesirable
 17 choices below.

- 18
 19 1. *Delayed Admission* - These churches will delay admission to the Lord's Supper for
 20 an eligible, non-communing minor until he reaches a reasonable age to have the
 21 sufficient discernment, maturity, and independence to vote on church matters.
 22 These churches will tolerate delayed communion to ensure voting maturity.
- 23
 24 2. *Premature Voter* - These churches won't delay admission to the Supper for eligible
 25 covenant children but will ignore the legitimate concern about the minor's
 26 discernment, maturity, and independence for voting. These churches will tolerate
 27 voting immaturity in order to admit eligible covenant children to the sacrament.

28
 29 Neither are prudent choices, and neither have biblical support. Some churches may try to
 30 split the difference, but that's a compromise suffering the negative consequences of both
 31 those unreasonable choices (albeit, perhaps, for fewer years). If this Overture is enacted,
 32 it will have no effect on the average communing age in the PCA. It's only likely to increase
 33 the average *voting* age of "carefully examined" communing minors (*BCO 57-2*).⁶

34 35 **2. The History of "Good and Regular Standing" – *BCO 20-3* and *24-3***

36
 37 Since their adoption in 1879 (*BCO 6:3:4*), the elector conditions “good and regular standing”
 38 (*PCA BCO 20-3, 24-3*) did not guarantee voting privileges to all communicants, or disallow
 39 local congregations from observing additional voting rules. A member in “good standing” has
 40 a right to the Lord’s Super in both his home church and neighboring congregations. This voter

⁶ One example of what our Standards regard as too-early communion is called paedocommunion, which is the view that covenant children should be admitted to the Supper on the same basis they're admitted to Baptism. But that view is entirely unrelated to this Overture. For example, eight SJC members cited earlier in this Overture are favorable towards allowing congregations the option of a voting age restriction, but none have written or spoken publicly in favor of the paedocommunion view.

1 condition excludes parties under censure of suspension or strong presumption of guilt (cf.
 2 PCA BCO 33-4; 42-6). “Regular standing” is the status members enjoy in their home
 3 congregation and is indicative of their right to exercise congregation-specific privileges (e.g.
 4 solicitation of a letter of transfer; eligibility for office; pursuit of judicial process, etc.)
 5 *exercised in according to the rules of that congregation*. This voter condition excludes non-
 6 members, members with an abnormal relationship to the church (e.g. non-resident, dismissed,
 7 or associate members—cf., PCA BCO 25-3; 38-3, 46-4), and those who fall short of the voting
 8 conditions in local church bylaws and/or applicable civil laws (cf., BCO 25-11). This means
 9 that the voter conditions “good and regular standing” imply that congregations may observe
 10 additional voting rules. It does not mean that all communicants must be counted as voters.

11
 12 This interpretation of “good and regular standing” is confirmed by the following:

- 13
 14 a. *Antecedent Voter Conditions*—The original 1788 voting provision laid down two
 15 conditions that, on the understanding of many, could allow some *non-communicants* to
 16 vote: “No person shall be entitled to vote, who refuses to submit to the censures of the
 17 Church, regularly administered; or who does not contribute his just proportion, according
 18 to his own engagements, or the rules of that Church” (1788, *Form of Government*, 14:3)
 19 The first condition, requiring submission to censure, was the antecedent of “good
 20 standing.” The second requiring monetary contribution as required by local church “rules”
 21 was the antecedent of “regular standing.” The marginal summary calls those who meet
 22 these conditions, “regular members.” In 1865 the Old School GA of the PCUSA would
 23 expressly deny that it is “consistent with regular standing” for members to neglect “to
 24 support the church to which they belong.”⁷ Moreover, it was normative for congregations
 25 throughout 18th and 19th centuries to observe a variety of additional rules, confining voting
 26 to adults, heads of household, persons who had attended a church for a minimum period
 27 of time, etc.⁸ By confining voting to communicants, the 1879 BCO was more specific than

⁷ 1865 *Minutes of the Old School PCUSA GA*, 537; Cf. 1874 *Minutes of PCUS GA*, 487. William Moore, *The Presbyterian Digest* (Philadelphia, PA: Board of Publication, 1873), 404.

⁸ All sources are listed alphabetically by author; then (for those that record no author) by church name. (1) Annette C. Ball, *History of the Parsippany Presbyterian Church* (Parsippany, NJ: np, 1915), 14. (2) William M. Booth, *History of Syracuse Presbytery: 1796-1938* (Syracuse, NY: np, 1938), 126. (3) James R. Bullock, *Heritage and Hope: The Story of Presbyterians in Florida* (Orlando, FL: Synod of Florida PCUSA, nd), 51. (4) J. Frederick Dripps, *History of the First Presbyterian Church in Germantown* (Germantown, PA: np, 1908), 264. (5) Arista Hoge, *The First Presbyterian Church of Staunton* (Staunton, VA: Caldweel-Sites, 1908), 77-83. (6) F.D. Jones & W.H. Mills, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina Since 1850* (Columbia, SC: R.L. Bryan, 1926), 12, 855. (7) William P. McPherson, *History of First Presbyterian Church* (Raleigh, NC: Commercial Printing Co., 1991), 20-21. (8) J. Walker McSpadden, *The Central Presbyterian Church* (Montclair, NJ: Edward Madison, 1937), 1, 38-40. (9) Will A. McTeer, *History of New Providence Presbyterian Church* (Maryville, TN: np, 1921), 58-61. (10) James Y. Mitchel, *History and Directory of Temple Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: J.W. Daughaday, 1873), 219. (11) S.C. Red, *A Brief History of First Presbyterian Church, Houston, Texas* (Houston, TX: Wilson Stationary & Printing, 1939), 40, 55. (12) Thomas Smyth, *Manual for the Use of the Members of the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, SC* (Charleston, SC: Jenkins & Hussey, 1838), 104-107, 121-122. (13) Charles William Sommerville, *History of Hopewell Presbyterian Church* (Charlotte, NC: Observer Publishing House, 1939), 47-55. (14) James Stacy, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Georgia* (Elberton, GA: Press of the Star, 1912), 52-53. (15) Rhamanthus Stocker, *History of the Presbyterian Society of Honesdale* (Honesdale, PA: Herald Press, 1906), 161. (16) Louis Vos, *Presbyterianism in New Orleans* (No city, LA: Presbyterian Board of Publications of the

- 1 its predecessor. Yet, by adopting the general conditions “good and regular standing,” the
 2 1879 BCO secured greater freedom for congregations to define eligible voters with or
 3 without reference to monetary contribution.
 4
- 5 b. *BCO Context*—The indispensable corollary of electing a minister is subscribing to a
 6 minister’s call, by pledging monetary support (PCA BCO 20-5, 20-6). Historically, voters
 7 were required to pledge payment of a specific amount of a minister’s salary in the same
 8 congregational meeting in which they elected him (and to renew their subscription
 9 annually).⁹ Therefore, the original readers of the 1879 BCO would have concluded that
 10 indeed all communicants may vote, but only if they are able to perform the adult duty
 11 without which a pastoral election is incomplete.
 12
- 13 c. *Other BCO Provisions*—Historic and contemporary BCO provisions governing
 14 congregational meetings are equally compatible with minimum voting age. For example,
 15 BCO 25-1 (following 1933 PCUS BCO 27:152) makes communicant membership a
 16 necessary, but not a sufficient condition for congregation voting: “The congregation
 17 consists of all the communing members of a particular church, and they only are entitled
 18 to vote.” This provision is equivalent to the statement: “The pride consists of all the lions
 19 of a particular region, and they only birth lions.” BCO 25-1 no more states that all
 20 communicants are entitled to vote, than the latter implies that all lions are female.
 21 Therefore, BCO 25-1 is distinctly compatible with congregational voting conditions.
 22
- 23 d. *Reception*—The universal report about the 1879 voter conditions was that they *confined*
 24 voting to communicant members, never that they had secured voting privileges for every

Synod of Louisiana, 1931), 195-199, 341, 343-344. (17) R.A. Webb, *History of the Presbyterian Church of Bethel* (Bethel, SC: np, 1923), 14-15. (18) Edward Archer Wicher, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in California: 1849-1927* (New York, NY: The Graham Press, 1927), 163. (19) Howard McKnight Wilson, *The Tinkling Spring and Hermitage Presbyterian Churches, A Study of the Church and Her People: 1732-1952* (Fishersville, VA: Tinkling Spring & Hermitage Presbyterian Churches, 1954), 94, 177. (20) Woodworth, A History of the Presbyterian Church in Winchester Virginia, 40-42, 70. (21) *Manual of North Presbyterian Church Buffalo, NY* (Buffalo, NY: Geo. Reese & Co., 1853), 14-15. (22) *Articles of Association and Charter of the Calvary Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Crissy & Markley, 1853), 5-6. (23) *Bylaws of the Presbyterian Church of the City of Charleston* (Philadelphia, PA: Adam Waldie, 1838), 3, 18. (24) *Historical Manual of the Presbyterian Church of Glen’s Falls, NY* (Glen’s Falls, NY: Messenger Printing, 1876), 50. (25) The Charter and Bylaws of the Presbyterian Church of Harrisburg (Harrisburg, PA: np, 1860), 4-5. (26) *Manual of the Second Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis* (Indianapolis, IN: I.W. Holman & Co., 1872), 10, 16. (27) *A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca, NY* (Ithaca, NY: Andrus & Church), 47. (28) *Manual of the North Presbyterian Church in the City of New York* (New York, NY: John A. Gray, 1858), 6-8, 12.

⁹ First Presbyterian (Charleston, SC) called its initial minister in 1724, thus: “forty-three persons, probably heads of families...subscribed a call inviting the Rev. Nathan Bassett to be their minister.” F.D. Jones and W.H. Mills, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Company, 1926), 12, cf. 1026. At its 1898 congregational meeting, First Presbyterian (Charleston, WV) sought to extract funding for a minister’s salary, and “Deacons were to call upon all members who did not ‘then and there’ subscribe” to carry out their duty. Joe B. Overmeyer, *History of the Presbytery of Kanawha, 1895-1956* (Charleston, WV: Jarrett Printing, 1956), 274.

1 communicant.¹⁰ Commentator F.P. Ramsay limits his discussion to which parties are
 2 definitively excluded from voting by the *BCO* conditions—non-members, non-
 3 communing members, and parties under censure—he does not suggest that all other
 4 communicants must be included.¹¹

- 5
- 6 e. *Application*—For the decades following the adoption of the 1879 *BCO*, Southern
 7 Presbyterian churches retained historic voter requirements as entirely consistent with *BCO*
 8 voter provisions. In 1895, Second Presbyterian Charleston continued to limit voting in
 9 pastoral elections to adult men who had contributed to the church budget by renting a
 10 pew.¹² In 1907, one author who wished to see both “young and old” participate in
 11 Southern Presbyterian officer elections reports that the opposite practice was common:
 12 “Unhappily, it is far too often the case that when an election is ordered by the authorities
 13 of the church” such parties are found “leaving the church building.”¹³ The 1891 PCUS
 14 GA stated, “It is the settled doctrine of our church that women...are prohibited from
 15 speaking by way of exhortation, or leading in prayer, or discussing any question publicly
 16 in the meetings of the church or congregation as a mixed assembly.”¹⁴ Commenting on
 17 this policy, it was reported at the 1956 GA that the “traditional position of our church”
 18 was to “forbid women to speak or vote in congregational meetings.”¹⁵ Indeed, it was not
 19 until 1920 that the PCUS GA would adopt the still very conservative policy: “any mission,
 20 if it so desires, may by majority vote make its women missionaries members of the mission
 21 technically so called, and accord them the privilege of voting.”¹⁶ Especially in their
 22 business transactions, PCUS churches understood it to be their right to regulate suffrage
 23 as they saw fit. In 1926, suffrage in the business meetings of Carrolton Presbyterian, New
 24 Orleans was extended to those “who subscribe and contribute annually.”¹⁷ In 1954,
 25 Conservative Presbyterians were reticent to unite with the UPC and PCUSA, because
 26 these Churches denied the “generally accepted policy in our Presbyterian Church (U.S.)
 27 that each individual church owns and manages its church property as the congregation
 28 shall so direct, without any help or advice from any Church Court or agency.”¹⁸ After
 29 all, each edition of the PCUS *BCO* (cf., 1942 *BCO*, 13:52) affirmed the session
 30 representing a congregation has “the power to establish rules for the government,
 31 discipline, and extension of the Church” (cf. PCA *BCO* 11-2)

¹⁰ 1877 *PCUS GA Minutes*, 583. Stuart Robinson, “The Revised Book of Church Order,” in *The Southern Presbyterian Review* Vol. 30, No. 1, (Jan., 1879), 140. J. Aspinwall Hodge, *What is Presbyterian Law as Defined by the Church Courts?* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1882), 56.

¹¹ Ramsay, *An Exposition of the Form of Government*, 129.

¹² Gilbert Robbins Brackett, *Manual for the Use of the Members of the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston* (Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 1894), 39-40.

¹³ Clement Read Vaughan, “The People in Church Elections” in *The Union Seminary Magazine* Vol. 18, No. 4 Apr-May, 1907, 284.

¹⁴ 1891 *PCUS Minutes*, 260.

¹⁵ 1956 *PCUS Minutes*, 141-142.

¹⁶ 1920, *PCUS Minutes*, 73.

¹⁷ “Charter of Carrolton Presbyterian Church,” as amended December 26, 1926, Article III. In 1926, the “Corporation” of First Presbyterian, Columbia, SC was “comprised of all male members 21 years old and above who contribute to the support of the church.” Jones & Mills, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina*, 651.

¹⁸ Randolph B. Lee, “Analysis of the Proposed Plan of Union,” in *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, Sep 15, 1954, 6.

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2 f. *Contrast*—Progressive churches intent on encouraging universal communicant suffrage
3 recognized that association of voting privileges with membership in “good and regular
4 standing” was insufficient for that end. The Biblical, rational, and historical precedents for
5 limiting suffrage to adult communicants were so widely recognized, that it was necessary
6 to expressly prohibit that limitation. Hence, next to non-communicant contributors, the
7 1897 PCUSA GA would define eligible voters as “all communicant members in good
8 standing, *of whatever age*” (emphasis added), and its official polity manuals throughout
9 the twentieth century would consistently adopt the same language.¹⁹

10 11 **3. PCUS Allowance for Minimum Voting Age**

12
13 For twelve years prior to the creation of the PCA in 1973, the Constitution of the Southern
14 Presbyterian Church *expressly allowed* congregations to confine voting to those who had
15 reached a minimum age, and who were sufficiently active in their church (1961 PCUS BCO,
16 5-1). In the publications of those conservatives who helped to form the PCA, one finds written
17 support for minimum voting age, and some of the 259 churches which founded the PCA
18 entered the new denomination with a minimum voting age provision.

19
20 The minimum voting age provision adopted at the PCUS centennial assembly (1961) reflected
21 a perspective on congregational voting that was more consistent with its 1861 founding, than
22 the view that had developed in the 20th century. Leading members of the PCUS had come to
23 embrace the PCUSA position, holding that voting must be extend to all communicants
24 regardless of age.²⁰ However, it is evident that this perspective had not been universally
25 imbibed. The 1961 minimum voting age provision follows a 1959 overture testifying to the
26 facts that (a) already voting “practices and procedures vary greatly between individual
27 churches” and (b) “in some cases, the lack of wisdom, and efficient and fairly administered
28 procedures, result in the election of officers unsuitable and unprepared for their
29 responsibilities.”²¹ (There came to be a problem, for example, with congregations electing
30 and installing as Ruling Elders those who had hardly reached young adulthood.²²) It is of little
31 surprise, therefore, that only one Presbytery (Congaree) out of eighty-four objected to the

¹⁹ 1897 *PCUSA Minutes*, 138. William H. Roberts, *A Manual for Ruling Elders and Church Sessions* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1918), 83. Lewis Mudge & William Finney, *Manual for Church Members and Officers* (Philadelphia, PA: Board of Christian Education, 1926), 217. Eugene C. Blake, *Presbyterian Law for the Local Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Board of Christian Education, 1953), 22

²⁰ Pickney J. Garrison, *The Presbyterian Survey*, Vol. 61, Is. 6, 22.

²¹ “Overtures to the 1959 General Assembly,” in *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, March 25, 1959.

²² Edited by RE Jack Williamson and authored by others who would work to form the PCA, *Presbyterian Churchmen United* reported on this problematic trend as it persisted into the 1970’s, “the emotional cause of the church...[,] is women’s liberation and youth rule.” *Contact*, No. 10, July 1971, 3. Noting how it contradicted 1 Timothy 3:6 and 5:22, the same publication would lament that “A North Miami congregation recently ordained an 18 year old college student to the office of Ruling Editor.” *Contact*, No. 21, Feb 1973, 2. Again, conservatives in the South lambasted the 1973 moderator of the PCUSA GA for “suggesting that his denomination should elect a teenager as moderator in 1974.” “Editorials,” in *Presbyterian Journal*, May 16, 1973, 12. In its revision of the BCO, one of the objectives sought by the PCA was, “Guarding against young people being elected to office.” *Minutes of the Advisory Convention of the Continuing Church Presbyterian Church* (Grover Park, NC, 1973), 10.

1 1961 minimum voting age provision.²³ Conservative appreciation for it is evident in the
 2 *Presbyterian Journal*. Edited by G. Aiken Taylor (1978 PCA GA Moderator), this publication
 3 described itself as “seeking to defend, encourage, interpret and report developments in the
 4 Church to be formed in 1973”; that is, the PCA. Its February 20, 1974 issue contains an article
 5 by Rev. Lawrence E. Eyres, advising congregations as to how they may be involved in the
 6 “Screening of Ruling Elders.” There, Rev. Eyres prescribes a variety of complex questions
 7 to consider about an elder candidates’ qualifications that could only be engaged by “adult
 8 voting members of the congregation.”²⁴ Hence, in their votes to withdraw from the PCUS
 9 with a view to forming a continuing, conservative Presbyterian Church, one finds founding
 10 PCA congregations observing a minimum voting age.²⁵

11
 12 Since its founding in 1973, the PCA would largely model its BCO after the 1933 edition of
 13 the PCUS *BCO*. Although this edition lacks express provision for minimum voting age, we
 14 have already seen that the elector conditions of “good and regular standing” had historically
 15 been compatible with congregational voting rules. Hence, for founding PCA congregations
 16 with a preexisting minimum voting age, the 1973 constitution would imply that eligible voters
 17 *must comply* with congregational voting rules, not that congregational voting rules *must cease*
 18 *to exist*.

20 **4. Reception of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod**

21
 22 Another indication that many (perhaps most) early PCA congregations found minimum voting
 23 age acceptable, is from the PCA’s unanimous 1981-1982 vote to receive the RPCES
 24 (consisting of 164 churches), whose Constitution provided for minimum voting age.²⁶

25
 26 In 1979, three years before the RPCES joined with the PCA in 1982, the PCA had 22
 27 presbyteries and 460 churches, and the RPCES had 17 presbyteries and 190 churches. The
 28 RPCES churches brought Covenant College and Covenant Theological Seminary with them
 29 into the PCA and increased the total number of PCA churches by 40%. Pacific NW Presbytery
 30 was one of those 17 RPCES Presbyteries.²⁷

31
 32 At the time of the Joining & Receiving, many RPCES churches (probably most) set minimum
 33 voting ages. But nowhere in our 1979-1982 GA Minutes is there any indication that the RP's
 34 joined the PCA with the understanding that their congregations had to relinquish the freedom

²³ *Presbyterian Journal*, Apr 26, 1961, 5.

²⁴ Lawrence R. Eyres, “Screening Elders,” in *Presbyterian Journal*, Feb 20, 1974, 8. Eyres’s series of articles, published originally in the OPC’s *Presbyterian Guardian*, were later compiled as, *Elders of the Church* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980).

²⁵ Kennedy Smart, *I Am Reminded: An Autobiographical, Anecdotal History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (No Location, No Publisher, 1998), 39. Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999), 187.

²⁶ *The Standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod Vol. 2* (Coventry, CN: Christian Training Inc., 1980), II:6.

²⁷ The 17 RPCES presbyteries at that time included: E. Canada, Northeast, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Delmarva, Pittsburgh, Southeast, Florida, Southern, Illiana, Midwestern, Great Lakes, Great Plains, Rocky Mountain, Southwest, California, and Pacific Northwest. (M9GA, 1981, p. 338)

1 to set a minimum voting age. Nowhere in GA Minutes do we read that the 416 RP ministers
 2 and 719 RP elders were told to, or expected to, end that practice. Both denominations had
 3 Committees that worked together on the J&R. The matter of voting age was never noted as a
 4 difference between the denominations, much less an issue. Dr. Morton Smith, the PCA Stated
 5 Clerk at that time, produced a paper titled "Some of the Characteristics of the Polity of the
 6 PCA" whose stated purpose was to "present the distinctives of the polity of the PCA." (*M9GA*,
 7 p. 339-43) Minor suffrage was not mentioned. The "Ad Interim Committee to Discuss Areas
 8 of Agreement, Differences & Difficulties" produced a Table comparing twenty-seven "Areas
 9 of Similarities & Differences." The Table included differences in positions on the Masonic
 10 Order, Christian liberty on alcohol, and the NAE. But there was no mention of any difference
 11 between the PCA and RPCES regarding the freedom of a congregation to set voting age
 12 restrictions, much less any expression of concern.²⁸

13
 14 All 22 PCA presbyteries voted in favor of receiving the RPCES churches, without any
 15 indication it was contingent on the RP churches deleting their voting age requirements. And
 16 the PCA's 9th GA adopted the AIC recommendation that "all ordained officers in the RPCES
 17 will be received into the PCA without examination." (p. 306)

18
 19 The Pacific Northwest Church in the *Psiaki* Case was one of those 190 RP churches that came
 20 into the PCA in 1982. That Church had a voting age requirement in its bylaws since 1959. It
 21 came as a quite as surprise decades later to be told by the SJC in March 2024 that they had
 22 acted contrary to the *BCO* for the last 42 years they had been in the PCA. So, either the PCA
 23 expected the RP churches to drop the restrictions without clearly telling them or (more likely)
 24 the PCA never expected them to do so - probably because PCA churches themselves had
 25 voting age restrictions. The differences between churches regarding voting age restrictions
 26 have been non-controversial for over 40 years.

27 28 **5. Psiaki vs. PNWP**

29
 30 The aforesaid considerations have led many congregations to believe that although the *BCO*
 31 does not expressly provide for minimum voting age, the practice is nevertheless allowed, quite
 32 like "term eldership." (In the PCA "term eldership" is an acceptable practice,²⁹ despite its
 33 lack of *BCO* "provision."³⁰) However, in March 2024, the SJC sustained a Complaint and
 34 ruled "a church may not restrict the voting rights of communicant members of their
 35 congregation on the basis or age, or for any other reason, except where there is a clear
 36 Constitutional warrant for so doing (e.g., the member is not in good standing or is not present
 37 at the meeting where the election is taking place)." (*M5IGA*, p. 877) There are probably
 38 hundreds of PCA churches that had a voting age restriction prior to the *Psiaki* Decision. While
 39 the Decision had no impact on the age of children admitted to the Lord's Supper, the average
 40 voting age in the PCA dropped dramatically overnight.

41

²⁸ M9GA 1981, full Report on pp. 304-357; Table on pp. 344-57.

²⁹ M6GA, 191.

³⁰ M5GA, 70.

1 The SJC Decision did not dispute the wisdom of a minimum voting age. It simply rendered
2 an interpretation that the BCO did not presently permit such. The Decision also stated:

3
4 If there were interest in restricting the rights of communicant members to vote
5 in officer elections, then the Constitution would have to be amended to reflect
6 in express fashion that restriction. Absent such amendment, the Constitutional
7 right of any communicant members to vote in an officer election may not be
8 abridged or denied, even by church bylaws. (*M51GA*, p. 877)
9

10 While agreeing with the constitutional interpretation in *Psiaki*, SJC members TE David Coffin
11 and RE Jack Wilson suggested such an amendment below in their Concurring Opinion.

12
13 [T]here is nothing about making a credible profession of faith that signals the
14 proper exercise of other rights of membership, rights that typically take further
15 maturation before reasonable competence—intellectual, emotional, physical,
16 and spiritual—has been achieved. ... There is nothing about a credible
17 profession of faith that implies competence, or necessitates the exercise of
18 these rights, and they may well be reasonably regulated by age regulations.
19 (*M51GA*, p. 880)
20

21 This Overture proposes such an amendment. We note five SJC members dissented in *Psiaki*
22 and held that the BCO *already* allowed setting a minimum voting age.³¹

23 **6. Voting Age Presents No Conflict with BCO 6-4**

24
25
26 Some believe that *BCO* 6-4 secures for communicants the unqualified right to exercise all
27 church privileges (including voting). On this view, congregational bylaws which contain a
28 minimum voting age, and/or a constitutional provision allowing for congregations to adopt
29 one, would contradict that provision.

30
31 *BCO* 6-4. Those only who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been
32 baptized, and admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table, are entitled to all the
33 rights and privileges of the church.
34

35 Three considerations render untenable the view that all communicants have unqualified rights
36 to exercise all church privileges, including voting.

37
38 First, *BCO* 6-4 makes communicant membership a necessary, rather than sufficient condition
39 for the enjoyment of all church privileges. It is true, for example, that “Those only who are
40 US Presidents are entitled to collect a presidential pension.” Yet, an intervening condition
41 must be met before a president may take advantage of that privilege, namely, retirement.
42 Likewise, communicant membership in a local church must be understood as a necessary

³¹ Dissenting judges included RE Jim Eggert, TE David Garner, TE Sean Lucas, RE John Maynard, and RE John Pickering. Three Dissenting Opinions were written and also an Objection from RE Donahoe.

1 condition for exercising a variety of privileges, for which there are additional natural,
 2 constitutional, and civil conditions. To present children for covenant baptism, one must be a
 3 parent (*BCO* 6-1); to refuse to testify against a spouse, one must be married (*BCO* 35-2); to
 4 be eligible for officer nomination one must be an “active,” as opposed to “inactive,” church
 5 member (*BCO* 20-1); to contribute to a congregational quorum one must be a resident, as
 6 opposed to non-resident member (*BCO* 25-3); to vote in a church’s corporation meetings one
 7 must comply with the relevant civil laws (*BCO* 25-11); etc. A minimum voting age provision
 8 presents no greater conflict with *BCO* 6-4 than any of these examples.

9
 10 Second, *BCO* 6-4 ascribes all the privileges of the church to a plural subject—the *collective*
 11 of professed (and communed) believers—and not to each *individual* communicant. This is
 12 significant because some church “rights and privileges,” such as eligibility to be nominated
 13 and elected to office (*BCO* 46-4), do not belong to female communicants under any
 14 conditions. It follows that communicants possess all the rights of the church in *collective*
 15 *fashion*, as the body possesses *all* five senses, and Christ’s church possesses *all* the spiritual
 16 gifts. They do not possess all rights in *distributive* fashion, as if each communicant
 17 individually and at all times possesses all church rights and privileges. Therefore, again, a
 18 minimum voting age provision presents no conflict with *BCO* 6-4.

19
 20 Third, history confirms that the previous points reflect the natural sense of *BCO* 6-4, and that
 21 a minimum voting age provision is consistent with that paragraph. For two hundred years prior
 22 to the Constitutional adoption of the language in *BCO* 6-4, formal declaration that all the rights
 23 and privileges of the church belong to communicants was a basic component of new member
 24 reception as prescribed in Presbyterian manuals (and the Congregational constitutions from
 25 which the language was borrowed). Yet, the very same manuals also lay down a variety of
 26 voting restrictions.

27
 28 *Manual of the North Presbyterian Church of Buffalo, NY* ³²

29 “In consequence of these professions and engagements, We, the members
 30 of this church, do...welcome you to all its immunities and privileges.”
 31 “Only...persons of lawful age are entitled to vote”

32
 33 *Manual of First Congregational Church, Farmington, NH* ³³

³² *Manual of North Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, NY* (Buffalo, NY: George Reese & Co., 1853), 12, 14. Cf., *Manual of the North Presbyterian Church in the City of New York* (New York: John A. Gray, 1858), 6, 21. *Brief History, Constitution, Rules, and Catalogue of Members of the First Presbyterian Church of Steubenville, Ohio* (Steubenville, OH: Conn’s Book and Job Office, 1858), 11, 17. Shepherd Knapp, *A History of the Brick Presbyterian Church in the City of New York* (New York, NY: Scribner Press, 1909), 121, 144, 255, 351, 540. Jones and W.H. Mills, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Company, 1926), 12, 650, 855, 1026. Joel Parker & T. Ralston Smith, *The Presbyterian’s Handbook of the Church* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1861), 34, 203. *Manual of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Savannah* (Savannah, GA: Morning News Print., 1890), 26, 28.

³³ Henry Pitkin, *Manual of the First Congregational Church, Farmington NH* (Farmington, NH: J.E. Fernald & Son, 1876), 7, 8. Cf., *Manual of the Congregational Church of Dubuque, IA* (Dubuque, IA: Miners Express Office, 1849), 15, 12. *Manual of First Congregational Church in Elyria, Ohio* (Cleveland, OH: Short & Forman, 1880), 32, 19. *Paul Manual of the First Congregational Church, Bristol, RI* (Providence, RI: Providence Press, 1872), 16, 43. *Manual of the First Congregational Church, Natick, MA* (Boston, MA:

1 “In view of such a belief...we, the members of this church...declare
 2 you entitled to all the privileges of this church, and a sharer of all its
 3 responsibilities.”

4 “In Church affairs every member in good standing eighteen years of
 5 age shall be allowed to vote.”
 6

7 Finally, to claim that the language of *BCO* 6-4 requires minor communicant voting without
 8 restrictions, would be like saying all REs who've been appointed by their Session are entitled,
 9 *without condition*, to all the rights and privileges of a GA Commissioner. But we know that
 10 no RE can vote at GA without having paid a registration fee. If he has not, then he is not in
 11 "regular" standing in the context of that GA, with the result that he has no right to vote.
 12

13 7. Common Grace and Societal Views

14
 15 Civil society regards minors as full *citizens* but clearly doesn't regard them as having the
 16 requisite discernment to think or act responsibly as an adult. The age at which someone legally
 17 ceases to be a minor in the US varies by state. It's 18 in most, but it's 19 in AL, CO, MD, and
 18 NE, and 21 in IN and MS. Various government entities set a minimum age for military service,
 19 purchasing prescriptions or alcoholic beverages, and for voting in federal, state, county and
 20 local elections. Ordinarily, a minor can't legally consent to a contract or open a bank account
 21 by himself. In most states, minors can't buy spray paint, fireworks, knives, dry ice, paintballs,
 22 nail polish remover, or a lottery ticket. Most states can remove a minor from his parent's home
 23 and place him in foster care against his will if the state believes he's in an unsafe environment.
 24 Only one US state allows a minor to choose which parent gets physical custody in a divorce
 25 (Georgia), and even then he must be at least 14 and his choice must be approved by a judge.
 26

27 Ordinarily, minors can't legally consent to their own medical care. The PCA recently sent
 28 letters to government officials condemning, among other things, the ability of a minor to make
 29 decisions regarding medical measures like puberty intervention drugs. The letter rightly
 30 asserted minors have "*vulnerabilities [that] can be preyed upon by powerful external forces,*
 31 *[and] they are also susceptible to the internal confusions and instabilities often accompanying*
 32 *childhood.*" The letter rightly observed: "*Children whose minds and personalities are still*
 33 *developing do not yet possess the perspective or maturity to make these decisions.*"³⁴ But
 34 many of those "minds and personalities" also lack the competence, perspective, and maturity

Thomas Todd, 1877), 13, 21. *Manual of the First Congregational Church*, London, ON (London, ON: Free Press Printing, 1882), 5, 12. *Manual of the First Congregational Church of Pittsfield, MA* (Pittsfield, MA: Chickering & Axtel, 1881), 14, 24. *Historical Sketch and Manual of the First Congregational Church of Ridgefield, CN* (Ridgefield, CN: Ridgefield Press, 1904), 23, 28. *Manual of First Congregational Church of Windsor, CN* (Hartford, CN: Lockwood & Brainard, 1879), 8, 13. *Manual of the First Church in Cambridge* (Boston, MA: Samuel Usher, 1900), 80, 82. *Manual of the First Congregational Church of Chelsea, MA* (Boston: J.A. Butler, 1875), 10, 22. *The Council Manual for a Congregational Church* (Boston: The Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society, 1896), 40, 13. *Manual of the First Congregational Church of Pittsfield, MA* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1873), 14, 24. *Manual of the First Congregational Church in Camden, NY* (Camden, NY: W.C. Stone, 1876), 26, 32.

³⁴ <https://byfaithonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/General-Letter.pdf> & *M51GA*, p. 1091

1 to vote on whether to incur a church mortgage, petition presbytery to dissolve a minister's call
2 against his wishes, or to re-affiliate with a less orthodox denomination.

3
4 **8. Status Quo** - There are hundreds of PCA churches that had a voting age restriction prior to
5 the *Psiaki* Decision. It is likely that many still do. Minors typically do not vote in our 215
6 Korean churches. To our knowledge, RPR has never recommended GA cite a presbytery for
7 allowing a church to have a minimum voting age. These churches have demonstrated that
8 setting a minimum voting age does not lead to other voting restrictions.

9
10 **9. Strong Support in 1996** - Between the 26th and 27th GAs (Ft. Lauderdale 1996; Colorado
11 Springs 1997), presbyteries voted 39-11 to *explicitly* allow a congregation to set a minimum
12 voting age. (That was 78% approval of the presbyteries that voted. Six presbyteries did not
13 vote, including four Korean.) However, the 27th GA declined to approve the change. Those
14 who attended the Colorado Springs GA did not adopt any reasons for opposing the change.
15 There were likely a variety of reasons men voted as they did, perhaps including that the *BCO*
16 already permitted voting age restrictions.

17
18 **10. Pittsburgh Presbytery's Overture in 2022** - Pittsburgh filed Overture 30 with the 49th
19 GA in Birmingham, proposing GA add a new *BCO* 6-5, to provide the following:

20
21 *BCO* 6-5 (all new). A congregation may, at its discretion by a vote of 2/3, set
22 the minimum voting age for its communing members, provided it is not greater
23 than eighteen (18) years of age. The congregation may also, at its discretion,
24 set a different minimum voting age for *different matters* provided it is not
25 greater than eighteen (18) years of age. (emphasis added)

26
27 The GA Committee on Constitutional Business expressed concerns, primarily about the
28 undefined phrase "different matters." The Overtures Committee didn't recommend GA answer
29 in the negative. Instead, by a 79% majority, the OC recommended it be "referred back" to
30 Presbytery "*without prejudice* yet paying particular attention to the concerns in the CCB
31 report." (emphasis added) This was included in the OC's omnibus recommendation, and no
32 GA commissioner made a motion to split it from the omnibus. The recommendation was
33 adopted without debate by vote of 2,062-33.³⁵ This present Overture addresses the concerns
34 expressed by the 2022 CCB.

35
36 **11. Existing PCA Polity Differences** - PCA Churches already have a large degree of freedom
37 regarding many significant decisions, including polity matters. Below are just a few examples:

- 38 – ruling elders elected for set terms of office vs. indefinitely
39 – super-majority requirement for election of pastor or elder
40 – mandatory class for prospective adult members (even transferring PCA members)
41 – frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper

42 Prior to the *Psiaki* Decision, voting age restrictions were simply one more polity issue left to
43 the discretion of the local church.

³⁵ Minutes 49th GA. Assembly action p. 77; OC report p. 108; CCB p. 425; Overture in full pp. 1345-48.

1
2 **12. De Facto Minimum Age** - All church sessions, albeit indirectly, have a minimum voting
3 age - i.e., the age of the youngest child admitted to the Lord's Supper. For example, it might
4 be age 8 in Church A and age 12 in Church B. If Sessions can indirectly determine voting age
5 that way, then a congregation should also have the right to do so.
6

7 **13. Church Corporations** - In acknowledging the civil government's right to bar minors from
8 voting in church corporations, *BCO* 25-11 implies that the question of a voting age
9 requirement is one of the "circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of
10 the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of
11 nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always
12 to be observed." (WCF 1:6) This implies that a right for all communing members to vote on
13 all church matters is *not* mandated by Scripture. *BCO* allows for voting age restriction for
14 churches if their state requires such; this overture simply extends this freedom to all
15 congregations regardless of state laws governing corporations. This may be especially
16 important for multi-state presbyteries such as Pacific NW that have differing laws within their
17 geographic boundaries.
18

19 **14. BCO Preliminary Principle 6**

20
21 PP6 - Though the character, qualifications and authority of church officers are
22 laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of officer
23 investiture, the power to elect persons to the exercise of authority in any
24 particular society resides *in that society*. (emphasis added)
25

26 Historically, voting restrictions for communing minors have not been regarded as violating
27 PP6. The main point of PP is that nobody *outside the congregation* can appoint those in
28 authority over that *congregation*. Some might object that a minimum voting age would place
29 a non-voting communicant under the jurisdiction of elders he never had the chance to vote
30 for. But that is also true if a minor communicant's parents do not drive him to the
31 congregational meeting when elders are elected. It is also true if his parents transfer to another
32 PCA church. Minor communicants are irregular members in many regards. For example,
33 elders will most likely refer any matter regarding discipline of a minor communicant to his
34 parents, rather than deal with him directly. A minimum voting age does not violate
35 Preliminary Principle 6.
36

37 **15. Imposing Other Voting Restrictions?** - This Overture does not "open the door" for
38 congregations to add other restrictions to voting. On the contrary, it actually *closes* any such
39 door by only explicitly permitting restrictions based on a minor's age. Any voting rule adopted
40 by a congregation that tried to disallow communicant voting based on head-of-household,
41 gender, race, politics, etc. would undoubtedly be regarded as an exception of substance by the
42 church's presbytery and deemed unconstitutional by the SJC in any review.
43

44 **16. No Change to Pby/GA Representation & Judicial Rights** - This Overture doesn't
45 recommend any change to the paragraphs on proportional congregational representation at

1 Presbytery or GA - *BCO* 13-1 and 14-2 (i.e., two REs for first 350 "communing members,"
2 etc.) It is not necessary to change "communing members" to "voting communing members."
3

4 **17. No Change to Judicial Rights** - In addition, this Overture is not recommending any
5 change to judicial oversight of minor communing members or their appellate rights. So,
6 whenever "communing member" is used in *BCO* Part II Rules of Discipline, it will apply to
7 *all* communing members - voting and non-voting (e.g., *BCO* 33-4, 36-1). We note that
8 although permissible, it is rare for a session to enact formal discipline on a minor while he is
9 under the "jurisdiction" of his parents. That points again to the irregular standing of
10 communing minors. So, if this Overture is adopted, a non-voting communing member would
11 still officially be subject to judicial process and thus should have the right to appeal, as rare
12 as that might be.
13

14 While there are mixed opinions on whether a non-voting communing member should have
15 the right to file a complaint, this Overture is not recommending any change to *BCO* 43-1. We
16 note a *BCO* complaint from a minor is very rare. One has never reached the SJC.
17

18 **18. Related Considerations** - If a church decides to establish a rule setting a minimum voting
19 age, it may have communicants under that age who can presently vote. The church will need
20 to decide whether to "grandfather clause" those minors or apply its new voting age rule to
21 them. This Overture does not suggest anything on that question. In addition, because minor
22 communicants presently have voting privileges (per the SJC Decision in *Psiaki*), they would
23 be entitled, regardless of their age, to vote on any motion to establish a minimum voting age
24 in their congregation. Most congregations probably require a two-thirds majority to revise
25 bylaws, and in churches without bylaws, it seems Roberts Rules would require a two-thirds
26 majority to adopt a rule limiting the right to vote.
27

28 Understandably, this change could result in instances where a family transfers to a PCA church
29 with a different policy than their previous one. We trust parents could explain to their children
30 that our churches have the freedom to set a minimum voting age, just like parents explain why
31 some of our churches celebrate the Lord's Supper with different frequency or with only juice.
32 Similar differences between congregations are already permissible. It's possible for a minor
33 to be a communing member of Church A, but when his parents transfer to Church B, the new
34 Session can decline to examine the minor for admission to the Lord's Supper, at least per the
35 SJC's interpretation of *BCO* 57-2 in a case 20 years ago.³⁶ If a *Session* has the constitutional
36 freedom to do that, it seems a congregation should have the freedom to set a minimum voting
37 age different than other congregations.
38

39 **19. Further Reading**

³⁶ Case 2003-04: *Complaint for Dr. and Mrs. Chin v. Covenant Presbytery (M33GA, 2005, p. 113* By a vote of 14-7, the SJC adopted the following as the Statement of the Issue and the Judgment: "Did the Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church [Jackson, TN] err in its understanding and application of *BCO* 57-2 in denying the request of Dr. and Mrs. Chin to examine their young children [who were communing members at their prior PCA church] for admission to the sealing ordinances [in their new church]? No."

- 1
- 2 ○ The March 2023 Objection in Case 2022-20: *Complaint of Wilson v. Pacific NW.*
- 3 *(M50GA*, pp. 940-58) at https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/50th_pcaga_2023.pdf
- 4 & <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hsYrEMVV36CVj6mul3-tKx5FlvpnuA-8/view>
- 5 ○ Pacific NW's Representative TE Dr. Brant Bosserman's Brief in the *Psiaki* Case:
- 6 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fmEl6Je5EIOFWbYeP5NdHJKq7e5CT5Kb/view>
- 7 ○ The March 2024 Objection in Case 2023-11: *Complaint of Mr. Psiaki v. Pacific*
- 8 *NW. (M51GA*, pp. 899) at https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/51st_pcaga_2024.pdf
- 9 & <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cZZHOTooJGaRcBvcMkKyigIzfk3JP7jp/view>

10
11 **Endnote:** Because this Overture proposes an amendment to *BCO* 25-1 (*the* main provision
12 regarding voting rights) and proposes parentheticals in 20-3 and 24-3 referencing it, our
13 Presbytery does not believe any further conforming amendments are needed. For example, the
14 *BCO* presently denies suffrage to associate members in *BCO* 46-4. This provision in 46-4 is
15 taken to be sufficiently informative of other chapters, meaning, the associate member need
16 not be listed as occupying a different roll in his church of temporary residence (*BCO* 5-7; 12-
17 8); as not enjoying all privileges in his church of temporary residence (*BCO* 6-4); as incapable
18 of contributing to a congregational quorum in his church of temporary residence (*BCO* 25-2;
19 25-3); etc.

20
21 In a similar way, we don't believe any additional amendments are necessary on voting age,
22 given that *BCO* 25-1 is a clear and sufficient provision into which this freedom should be
23 located (along with the parentheticals in 20-3 and 24-3).

24
25 However, if the CCB advises otherwise, below are nine possible options.

26
27 5-7. Mission churches shall maintain a roll of communicant members, non-voting
28 communicant members (if there be any), and non-communicant members, in the same
29 manner as, but separate from, other particular churches.

30
31 6-2. Communing members are those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have
32 been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table. (See *BCO*
33 46-4 for associate members). A congregation may establish a rule setting a minimum
34 voting age for all communing members, provided it is not greater than eighteen (18)
35 years of age. For the purposes of the BCO, the phrase "voting communing members"
36 refers either to all communing members of a congregation, or, in congregations that
37 have so stipulated, only to the communing members having reached the minimum
38 voting age. (See *BCO* 25-1)

39
40 6-4. Those only who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and
41 admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table, are entitled to all the rights and privileges
42 of the church. However, the exercise of voting privileges may be delayed in churches
43 where there is a minimum voting age for communing members. (See *BCO* 25-1, 57-4,
44 and 58-4)

- 1 12-8. Every Session shall keep an accurate record of baptisms, of communing members, of
2 non-voting communing members (if there be any), of non-communing members, and
3 of the deaths and dismissions of church members.
4
- 5 25-2. The Session shall always call a congregational meeting when requested in writing to
6 do so:
7 a. by one-fourth (1/4) of the voting communing members of a church of not more than
8 one hundred (100) such members,
9 b. by one-fifth (1/5) of the voting communing members of a church of more than one
10 hundred (100) and not more than three hundred (300) such members,
11 c. by one-sixth (1/6) of the voting communing members of a church of more than three
12 hundred (300) and not more than five hundred (500) such members,
13 d. by one-seventh (1/7) of the voting communing members of a church of more than
14 five hundred (500) members but not more than seven hundred (700) such members,
15 e. by one hundred (100) of the voting communing members of a church of more than
16 seven hundred (700) such members.
17
- 18 25-3. The quorum of the congregational meeting shall consist of one-fourth (1/4) of the
19 resident voting communing members, if the church has not more than one hundred
20 (100) such members, and of one-sixth (1/6) of the resident voting communing
21 members if a church has more than one hundred (100) such members.
22
- 23 25-7. If a particular church is incorporated, the provisions of its charter and bylaws must
24 always be in accord with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America. All
25 the voting communing members on the roll of that church shall be members of the
26 corporation.
27
- 28 25-11. While a congregation convened in a meeting consists of all the voting communing
29 members of a particular church, and in matters ecclesiastical the actions of such local
30 congregation or church shall be in conformity with the provisions of this *Book of*
31 *Church Order*, ...
32
- 33 28-3. The Church should maintain constant and sympathetic relations with the children. It
34 also should encourage them, on coming to years of discretion, to make confession of
35 the Lord Jesus Christ and to enter upon all privileges of full communing communicant
36 church membership (except the right to vote in churches that set a minimum voting
37 age, until the minor has reached that age). If they are wayward they should be
38 cherished by the church and every means used to reclaim them.
39

40 *An earlier version of this Overture was approved at Pacific NW's Stated Meeting on 2/2/24.*
41 *A PNW Commission was authorized to revise and file when it deemed most prudent to do so.*
42 *Attested by TE Jerid Krulish, stated clerk*