

Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania instituted standards for criminal background checks to aid in the prevention of child abuse in 2014. The standard is baseline checks and renewal every five years. These regulations cover all individuals under the jurisdiction of the Presbytery of Huntingdon, i.e. all teaching elders, commissioned ruling elders, certified lay preachers, Approved Pulpit Supply, and persons under care. Commonwealth law requires that the presbytery oversee and document compliance with these regulations. Sessions, in turn, will be responsible for overseeing and documenting compliance by their employees and volunteers who interact with children in their setting.

Who: All teaching elders, commissioned ruling elders, certified lay preachers, Approved Pulpit Supply and persons under care of this presbytery are defined by the Commonwealth as Mandated Reporters. We care about the children and vulnerable adults of this presbytery, and we ask you to demonstrate your concern by submitting checks.

Action required: In addition to background checks, all pastors are required by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to complete Mandated Reporter Training. This is a free three-hour online course, which must be renewed every five years. You will find it online at www.reportabusepa.pitt.edu. Save your USER ID and password in a place where you might possibly find it five years down the road.

When you have completed the training, you will have the option to print off a certificate of completion. Please do this immediately and save to your computer. It may be difficult to return to this screen. Then send a copy of your certificate to the Stated Clerk Virginia Rainey either by email attachment to vfainey.sc@gmail.com; OR via snailmail to her home address: 784 Tanager Drive, State College, PA, 16803. Call her with any questions at (814) 867-7878. Do NOT send originals.

Thank you for helping us protect our children and vulnerable adults.

Virginia F. Rainey, Stated Clerk

Q & A:

Religious Exemption: Aren't churches exempt from this regulation?

Answer: No. Act 33, provision 6311, defines mandated reporters to include anyone who serves as a "Clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or religious organization."

Do I really have to get these checks and take this class?

Answer: Yes. The regulations state that the licensing body (that is the presbytery) must ensure that every one to whom it grants a license (that is teaching elders, lay preachers & pastors, Approved Pulpit Supply, and persons under care) be trained and retrained. This includes honorably retired pastors and active pastors & preachers ministering in congregations without children.

What are the consequences of ignoring this requirement?

Answer: Committee on Ministry has voted that renewals of terms of service and status of those without current background checks and certifications will not be approved. Further a note will be placed in the personnel files of each person under the jurisdiction of the presbytery indicating whether or not the individual has complied with state regulations and that information will be communicated in reference checks. Lay preachers will not be certified or recertified until training is complete. Non-Presbyterians must demonstrate compliance before being added or retained on the Approved Pulpit Supply.

Virginia F. Rainey,
Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Huntingdon