

GUIDELINES ON BACKGROUND CHECKS

by THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Revised March 2017

A. Who should obtain the background check?

Prior to conducting a background check, written permission must be obtained from the prospective employee or volunteer. Documentation from the background checks on all lay church workers for whom such checks are required by OCA regulations shall be obtained by the Diocesan administrator for background checks*.

In cases of clergy, the minor orders, youth workers, and paid church employees, the Ruling Bishop (or designated Diocesan administrator) shall obtain the necessary check.

In cases of seminary and diaconal program **applicants**, the institution or program director shall obtain the check. A seminarian who is petitioning for ordination **prior to graduation**, the OCA central administrator will obtain the background check with the approval of the institution. Once the seminarian has graduated and left seminary, however, and is seeking ordination, the Ruling Bishop/Diocesan Administrator must obtain the check.

The Office of the Metropolitan shall obtain the check on all heads of institutions (Deans and Chancellors) as well as stavropegial monasteries (Abbots).

*see table in section G

B. Who is required to receive a criminal background check?

Ordained clergy (Bishop, Priest and Deacon)

Minor Orders (Subdeacon and Reader)

Youth Workers (Church School Teachers, camp counselors, youth advisors / mentors, etc.)

Paid Church employees

Seminary Applicants

Diaconal Program Applicants

Candidates for Ordination

C. National Sex Offender Registry

The following leadership positions are **not** required to undergo a full background check, however, they **must** be checked on the free [National Sex Offender Registry](http://www.nsopw.gov) (<http://www.nsopw.gov>). Anyone who appears on a sex offender registry **CANNOT** hold any position of leadership in the Church. These

positions include but are not limited to:

Metropolitan Council Member*

Diocesan Council Member*

Parish Council Member*

Church Officer

Choir Director

Altar server (adult and teen)

*Council members who are nominated should be checked on the National Sex Offender Registry **prior to** the voting process so as to avoid removal after appointment should a negative finding be discovered.

NOTE: Some Dioceses may require a full background check on the above positions.

D. Where should background check documents be stored?

All background files for lay workers (consisting of application, interview notes, reference checks and background check results, plus related documents) are to be stored **confidentially and securely** at the parish. If the background check raises questions about the person's suitability for church service, then the rector (or head of church institution) is to pass this information on to the ruling bishop and consult with him about the next steps to take. Each volunteer or employee should have their own personnel file where the background check documents are to be stored.

Background documentation on readers, subdeacons, deacons and priests is to be requested and received by the ruling bishop and stored **confidentially and securely** at the central diocesan location.

E. How often are criminal history checks run?

A criminal history check must be obtained, and renewed **every three years** for the required positions.

F. How long are background records kept on file?

The criminal history documents are to be kept on file for three years until the individual's next background check is conducted, at which point the original may be destroyed. All other documents (original application, reference check, interview notes, etc.) must be retained as long as the volunteer/employee is in his/her role and for 7 years after the individual has left his/her position.

G. Which company do we use to run a criminal history and/or driver history check?

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America approved in December 2016 the centralizing of the criminal history check process. Each diocese will have an administrator who will be responsible for processing checks for clergy, church employees, and volunteers.

By the end of 2017, all OCA parishes will be required to use the company [Protect My Ministry](#) through their diocesan administrator. Each Diocese will be phased in over the next several months. The schedule is as follows:

Diocese	Phase in date	Diocesan Administrator
Stavropegial	In process	Fr. Eric Tosi egtosi@oca.org Cindy Heise cheise@oca.org
Diocese of New England	Completed - December 2016	David Zavednak dzaved@comcast.net
Albanian Archdiocese	Completed - December 2016	Fr. Mark Doku mdoku123@gmail.com
Romanian Archdiocese*	Completed - December 2016	Fr. David Oancea doancea@roea.org
Diocese of the Midwest	Completed - February 2017	Philip Sokolov chancery@domoca.org
Diocese of NY/NJ	Completed - February 2017	Fr. Leonid Schmidt leonid.schmidt@christthesaviour.org
Archdiocese of Washington DC	April 2017	TBD
Diocese of Western Pennsylvania	May 2017	TBD
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania	June 2017	TBD
Bulgarian Diocese*	July 2017	TBD
Diocese of the South	August 2017	TBD
Diocese of the West	September 2017	TBD
Diocese of Alaska	November 2017	TBD
Archdiocese of Canada**		
Diocese of Mexico**		

*Parishes under the Romanian and Bulgarian Dioceses that are located in Canada will be an exception to using Protect My Ministry.

**The Dioceses of Canada and Mexico will likely remain exceptions to the centralizing of this process for obvious reasons. However, a process for ensuring compliance in those countries are in development.

H. How do I ensure private information stays private?

Sensitive data, such as social security numbers, should be blacked out when documents are placed in the file. The documents (application, references, interview, etc.) should be kept in a secure location at the parish (in the case of lay workers) or diocesan office (in the case of clergy). Protect My Ministry automatically blacks out social security numbers on their criminal history checks which are stored electronically and access is limited to only the diocesan and central church administrators.

Further questions regarding background checks and the screening process should be directed to Cindy Heise at cheise@oca.org.

NOTE FOR PENNSYLVANIA RESIDENTS: The Commonwealth passed ACT PA 153 which requires that anyone working with youth in any capacity in a church must meet additional background check requirements which include PA State Police, Child Abuse Registry, and FBI fingerprinting. These are required every three years. Please contact your diocesan administrator for more information.