Presbytery of Baltimore
Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and Procedures

General Purpose Statement

THE PRESBYTERY OF BALTIMORE (The Presbytery) seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for children and other vulnerable persons who participate in our programs and activities. As noted in the *PCUSA Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy*, "Children, [and] youth…are a gift from God and the Church has a divine mandate to provide for their safety and nurturing. The Church is called to be a place that reflects the open arms of Jesus." The Presbytery of Baltimore has zero tolerance for abuse of any kind. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect children and vulnerable adults who are under the direct care by the Presbytery of Baltimore from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all persons (staff, volunteers, clergy, contractors) engaged in activities under the auspices of the Presbytery of Baltimore that involve:

- **Children** (ages 0–11),
- **Youth** (ages 12–17), and
- **Vulnerable Adults** (individuals 18 and over without the developmental or cognitive capacity to consent).

Together, children and youth (*i.e.*, anyone under age 18) are referred to as "minors" under this Policy.

Programs and partnerships that include overnight or out of town activities will be required to have their own policies specific to the individual circumstances, in addition to adhering to the requirements of this policy.

DEFINITIONS

Abuse exists when there is endangerment of the physical or mental health or welfare of a minor or vulnerable adult due to injury by act or omission of a parent, household or family member, or an individual who has care or supervision of the minor or vulnerable adult. Abuse and neglect include the following:

- **Neglect** includes leaving a minor or vulnerable adult unattended or the failure, refusal, or inability on the part of a caregiver to provide necessary care in a manner that harms the person's physical or mental health or welfare or creates a substantial risk of physical harm or mental injury to the person in their care.
- **Physical Abuse** includes physical injury inflicted by other than accidental means that indicates a minor or vulnerable adult's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of harm. Physical injury includes, but is not limited to, lacerations, bruising, fractured bones, burns, internal injuries, starvation, or other bodily harm. Conduct qualifying as Physical Abuse may include, but is not limited to, hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, unnecessary restraints, pushing, or other forceful physical contact which causes or creates substantial risk of causing injury.

- **Verbal Abuse** includes language that is degrading or threatening, and includes verbal interactions such as name calling, insults, cursing, derogatory remarks, belittling, and shaming.
- **Sexual Abuse** is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone without the capacity to consent, or any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position. Sexual abuse is contrary to the Scriptures and the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and is therefore always an offense for the purpose of discipline. Sexual abuse includes sexual molestation or exploitation of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, including allowing or encouraging the person to engage in obscene photography, film, or poses, or a sexual offense in any degree. Sexual abuse also includes all conduct defined in Book of Order D-10.0401c.
- **Emotional Abuse** includes conduct that reasonably causes harm to a minor or vulnerable adult's psychological or intellectual functioning, which is exhibited by emotional damage such as severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggression. Emotional damage may be demonstrated by substantial and observable changes in behavior, emotional response, or learning, which are incompatible with the consumer's age or stage of development. Emotional Abuse includes the following: shaming, humiliation, and cruelty.

In addition to this policy, all clergy are subject to the Presbytery of Baltimore Sexual Misconduct Policy and the PCUSA constitution. Abuse may also occur by the misuse of technology and exploitive digital/online behaviors.

SCREENING

All persons who desire to work with minors participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

Six Month Rule

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with minors until they have been involved with a member church of the Presbytery of Baltimore for a minimum of six (6) months, or unless they have been known by a minister member of the Presbytery of Baltimore for a minimum of six months

Written Application

All persons seeking or recruited to work with minors or vulnerable adults must complete and sign a written application that requires disclosure of church membership, previous experience with minors or vulnerable adults, and at least two personal references.

Reference Check

Reference checks for the applicant's former employers and volunteer positions involving experience with minors or vulnerable adults and personal references shall be contacted before allowing a person to work with minors or vulnerable adults. If a reference is non-responsive, the program/activity supervisor should document at least three attempts to contact the reference.

Criminal Background Check

All applicants are required to Submit to a **criminal background check** (renewed at least every 3 years or per insurer's recommendation). Certain positions involving work with minors may require an FBI/CJIS fingerprint check in accordance with Maryland law.

Program/activity supervisors have responsibility for determining what type of background check is required for applicants.

CPS Background Clearance

All applicants who will work with minors must also submit to a Child Protective Services ("CPS") Background Clearance form, which provides information about any prior abuse or neglect investigations involving the person.

Documentation of the reference checks, the background check authorization form and results, and policy acknowledgement form will be maintained in confidence on file at the office of the Presbytery of Baltimore.

Disqualification includes, but is not limited to:

- Prior history of abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect, child pornography, or conviction of any crime that would render the person unsafe to have contact with minors or vulnerable adults, including any conviction for a sex offense in any degree, or for any "crime of violence" as defined in Section 14-101 of the Criminal Law Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, drug trafficking, or any crime involving a minor or vulnerable adult.
- Prior church disciplinary action related to abuse or misconduct.

TRAINING

All those approved to work with minors and or vulnerable adults must complete a training program approved by the Insurance Board on abuse prevention and response, including the following courses or their successors:

1. Foundations-Preventing Abuse in Youth Serving Organizations
2. Keeping Your Church Safe
3. Duty to Report-Mandated Reporter
4. Social Media Safety

All those approved under this policy must sign a **code of conduct and policy acknowledgment form**.

SUPERVISION AND CONDUCT STANDARDS

Two Adult Rule

a minimum of two unrelated adult workers must be present for all activities involving minors or vulnerable adults.

In addition, no adult may share sleeping quarters with a minor (except for parent/legal guardian with written consent) and separate bathroom/shower times for adults and minors are required at overnight events

Open Door Policy

Doors to rooms where events are held should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Bathroom Procedures

Children five years of age and younger should use a classroom bathroom if one is available. If a classroom bathroom is not available, workers should escort a group of children to the closest bathroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the bathroom alone. The workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five, at least one adult male should take boys to the restroom and at least one adult female should take girls. The worker should check the bathroom first to make sure that the bathroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The worker should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, workers should *never* be alone with a child in a bathroom with the door closed and never be in a closed bathroom stall with a child.

Technology and Social Media:

- No private messaging or one-on-one online interaction with minors.
- All digital communication must be transparent and include another adult or guardian.
- Photos/videos may only be taken or shared with written guardian consent.

RESPONDING TO SUSPECTED ABUSE

The Presbytery complies with Maryland laws regarding reporting suspected abuse or neglect to civil authorities and cooperates with all related investigations. If an incident of abuse or neglect is suspected by any person, regardless of where or when it occurred,, the following procedure shall be followed:

1. All civil reports required by Maryland Law and the Book of Order G-4.0302 will be made. A verbal report to CPS and/or law enforcement should be made as soon as possible, with a written report following within 48 hours.

2. The parent or guardian of the alleged victim will be notified provided CPS approves such notification and the parent or guardian is not the alleged perpetrator of abuse or neglect.

3. If the suspected abuse is alleged to have occurred at a program or activity sponsored by the Presbytery, the Presbytery's insurance company will be notified, and the Presbytery will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company. The Presbytery will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities and the insurance company.

4. The worker or program participant alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse will immediately be placed on leave.

5. The Stated Clerk of the Presbytery will be informed and, if the alleged perpetrator is a member of Baltimore Presbytery all relevant procedures required by *Church Discipline* [D-7] in the PCUSA constitution will be followed

6. Persons credibly accused of abuse, neglect, or other misconduct related to minors and/or vulnerable adults may be removed from their position working with minors and/or vulnerable adults at Presbytery sponsored events and programs unless and until the alleged abuse is "ruled out," and/or the person is found not guilty of associated criminal charges. The Presbytery retains discretion to determine that a person should not be authorized to work with minors and vulnerable adults regardless of the outcome of a CPS investigation or criminal charges.

7. The privacy and confidentiality of those involved shall be protected to the extent reasonably possible, consistent with civil reporting requirements and the requirements of this Policy.

The Presbytery of Baltimore has zero tolerance for abuse. It is imperative that every employee or volunteer actively participates in the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults. If employees or volunteers observe red-flag or inappropriate behaviors and/or policy violations by other employees or volunteers, or consumers, it is their professional and personal responsibility to immediately report their observations in accordance with the reporting procedures above.

ACCIDENTAL INJURIES TO CHILDREN

In the event that a child or youth is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, workers will provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the worker's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, an ambulance will be called.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

RESPONSIBILITY

Compliance with this policy will be the responsibility of the chairpersons of partnerships and ministry groups and/or organizers of specific activities and events under the auspices of the presbytery.

PCUSA Protection Policy

The values and procedures of this policy are rooted in the tenets set forth in the **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Child/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy and its Procedures.** That policy statement may serve as a guide for further interpretation of the present document and

should be consulted if questions or situations arise not specifically covered by the present statement.

Acknowledgement of Policy

As an employee or volunteer working with children, youth or vulnerable adults under the auspices of the Presbytery of Baltimore, I confirm that I have read and agree to comply with the this policy, including all abuse prevention training required.

Please Print _____ Name _____Date

_____ _____Program

_____ Church

_____ Signature

Please return this form to the Presbytery of Baltimore:

office@baltimorepresbytery.org OR
5400 Loch Raven Blvd. Baltimore, MD 21239

Approved by the 881st presbytery meeting November 10, 2018
Revised by the 908th Stated Meeting 09-13-2025