

BACKGROUND CHECKS AND SAFE ENVIRONMENTS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
“ScreeningOne” and Proud to Protect
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

1. What kind of record history checks will have to be done?

There will be criminal record history checks that will involve the checking of public court records for convictions of felonies and misdemeanors. If there has been a change of residence, the check will be conducted in the prior state(s) of residence and Montana. If a pastor, administrator or principal has any questions about the results of the checks, they should discuss them with the diocesan Director of Safe Environment. Background checks will be *limited strictly to criminal history check and Social Security trace. In some instances, the background check could be expanded to include motor vehicle records as it pertains to those employees in positions which may involve the transportation of school children, (e.g., bus drivers).* **A credit report or medical record background evaluation will not be requested and/or undertaken.**

2. What will the checks reveal?

Criminal record history checks will show any convictions of felonies or misdemeanors (adverse action(s) that appear as a matter of public record in the judicial system).

3. Who will have to be checked?

Checks will be done on all priests, deacons and religious who have a pastoral appointment in the diocese such as Pastor, Parochial Administrator, Parochial Vicar, Chaplain, Seminarian or Catholic School Instructor, diocesan, parish school employees and contract services staff. Also to be checked are all volunteers with access to children or vulnerable adults as part of their voluntary service and retired clerics who are on pastoral assignment or provide sacramental ministry.

4. What if a person has already had a background check?

Individuals who have had background checks for whom there has been no interruption or break in employment are required to be checked every five (5) years.

5. How far back will the checks go?

The checks will go back as far as defined by Montana law. Background checks conducted in other states will be governed by their state statutes.

6. Will the person for whom the check is requested have to authorize it?

Yes. This is part of the Proud to Protect Safe and Sacred Program and individuals enter all pertinent information for the criminal record history check. This is completed for paid positions within the church, including school employees in addition to volunteer positions who have access to children or vulnerable adults.

7. Will the results of the checks be kept in confidence?

Yes, of necessity, the results will be released to the Diocese. The results will be made known only to the Diocese. Paper copies are not maintained, only electronic copies. Personal information on file will be maintained in a manner as required by federal law.

8. Will a person's birth date and Social Security number have to be provided?

The birth date and Social Security number are required for the Criminal Records History check and the Social Security trace. Refusal to provide the information that is required for the checks will preclude the person from consideration for the position. Additionally they will not be able to receive a Certificate of Completion for the training unless the background check is completed satisfactorily.

9. Will a person whose background is checked be given the right to dispute the findings if there is an error in the public records?

Yes. Whenever an organization, such as the diocese uses an agency like ScreeningOne to conduct background checks of individuals, the rights of the consumer (the job applicant) are protected by the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act. Although the title of the act might suggest that "credit" checks will be done, a person's credit is not a part of this background evaluation. As indicated in this document, our primary interest is to be able to give assurances that our clerics, employees, contract services staff and volunteers do not have a history of putting minors at risk.

10. Will any felony or misdemeanor conviction prevent an individual from a position in the church or school?

No. Many people have in one way or another made mistakes. We believe they should be allowed to move beyond those mistakes. However, individuals who have a history of child abuse, selling drugs to minors or other criminal convictions that may have put minors at risk cannot be placed in a position that involves responsibility for minors. *Any other type of criminal convictions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the hiring authority.*

11. Who requests the background checks? When are they done?

Background checks are part of the Safe and Sacred process. Each individual completes their personal information on-line and once training is complete and the background check is completed they receive a Statement of Completion. Regarding the

hiring of new employees, background checks should be completed **before** contracts are signed.

12. How is the check conducted?

ScreeningOne, a pre-employment screening agency, will conduct the check with appropriate agencies in the state where the applicant has worked. The results will be sent directly to the diocese. If the applicant's name appears for felony or misdemeanor convictions on any records search, the diocese will notify the pastor or supervisor.

13. Applicants for employment provide a resume, what information should I be requesting from volunteers so background checks can be completed?

In addition to any other information you may request as part of a comprehensive and prudent program for evaluating volunteers or staff, you have to obtain the birth date, Social Security number all the names by which the applicant has been known or has used including maiden names. You also need to know the states where the applicant has been living. The Background Check Authorization and Release Form and the Volunteer Application are good sources for securing the needed information.

14. What about minors that want to volunteer? Should I let them and does a criminal record history check have to be conducted on them?

As a rule there are no public records maintained for minors; therefore there can be no checks conducted. Nevertheless, we should be encouraging young people to become involved in church-related activities including service as a volunteer. However, only adults 21 years of age and older who have been properly checked should be allowed to function in an independent supervisory capacity with minors in any parish or school program. Young adults between the ages of 18-21 may assist the supervision of minors in a joint relationship with an adult supervisor 21 years or older. Minors under the age of 18 may assist with activities involving other minors but should never be expected to have supervisory responsibilities.

15. Does an applicant for either a staff or volunteer position have to provide the information required for a background check?

Refusal to complete the information will prevent the person from being considered for the position.

16. What are some examples of ministry or volunteer service that would **not** require checks?

All ministry positions and volunteers with access to children or vulnerable adults are required to have a background check including, Eucharistic Ministers to the Home Bound, Altar Server Trainers, music and hospitality ministers (if they volunteer with

young adults). Although many individuals feel they do not interact with children, the possibility always exists. It is better to err on the side of safety for all involved.

17. Do diocesan and church employees or contract services staff have to be checked even if their responsibilities do not involve regular contact with minors?

Although these individuals may not be involved on a regular basis with minors, their presence in the church or diocese implies trust and recognition simply by their involvement with the parish or diocese. In view of this implied trust, background checks may be required at the discretion of the Pastor.

18. In what states will the checks be conducted?

In the state(s) in which the applicant has worked, based upon the findings of the Social Security trace.

19. How long will the checks take?

Under normal conditions the checks are expected to be completed within 24 hours. However, we expect the turnaround time will take a greater amount of time when a large number of initial checks have to be conducted and when checks are required in other states.

20. Who is responsible for paying for the checks?

The hiring organization, i.e. the parish or school, will be responsible for the employee and volunteer checks and the diocese will be responsible for employees and volunteers at the Chancery.

21. How will the diocese know that everyone who must be checked will actually be checked?

The transition to the Safe and Sacred program should eliminate some of the guess work as individuals cannot be issued a Certificate of Completion without having gone through the background check process. However, it is an expectation that all persons responsible for the administration at the local level will assist in full compliance.

22. How much is the background check going to cost the parish or school?

Costs vary by individual. The minimum check which includes the Social Security trace, National Criminal Database Search and State of Montana Database serve costs \$27.50. When other states and alias names need to be researched the cost can go as high at \$74-\$100.

23. There have been reassurances of confidentiality and security regarding the documentation surrounding the background checks. How will this be

maintained? Who exactly, will be able to see the results of the background checks?

The only people who will review individual reports are the Safe Environment Coordinator, Director of Safe Environment and the Director of Human Resources. If something is questionable or negative in nature the concern will be brought to the attention of the diocesan attorney. If necessary the pastor, pastoral administrator, parish life coordinator, or school principal (supervisors) would then be notified. If something appears in the report that would render a person unfit for ministry, then the supervisor will take the necessary steps to remove the person from ministry or not hire the person in questions in the first place. The nature of criminal behavior would remain confidential. The same procedure would apply to someone unfit to be a chauffeur.

24. Can I get a copy of the results of my background check?

Yes. Contact ScreeningOne directly in writing at 1860 N. Avenida Republica de Cuba Tampa, FL 33605, with your request.

25. Are the Catholic schools using a different background release form than the one issued by the diocese?

No, schools utilize the same form and the same screening company.

26. In our parish adults take youth to nursing homes on a regular basis. The Knights of Columbus frequently have kids help set up tables and chairs for events. At the cemetery, we recruit young people to mow the lawn throughout the season. Do all of these adults have to have background checks?

Yes, according to the USCCB Norms. The concept is to make sure that any environment where adults interact or could have contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults is safe.