



## **Background Checks: How Much Is Enough?**

What if the background check you run is not enough to keep a felon or known offender from slipping through the cracks?

It's a question worth asking, since not all states have a centralized reporting process. Furthermore, although all criminal background check information originates at the county level, the frequency and depth of information that counties report can vary. This means that, yes, offenders *can* slip through the cracks in some states if only basic searches are run.

### **Extra searches for certain states**

Recently, a church employee decided to test this out by running the name of a known criminal through the church's background check system. Lo and behold, the individual's criminal history was not included in the background check report she received. This is precisely why Praesidium, Inc., the Church Pension Group's collaborator in the development of sexual abuse prevention materials since 2003, recommends additional background checks in certain states for more accurate and up-to-date reporting. Since 2012, Praesidium has offered discounted background screening packages to Episcopal institutions.

[Praesidium has compiled a list](#) of recommended additional searches by state. "These extra searches fill the gaps when there's no centralized office that houses all the information in a particular state," says Kimberlie Story, Background Check Coordinator for Praesidium.

Many clients select the Confidence Package that Praesidium offers, but Aaron Lundberg, Vice President of Account Services at Praesidium, says that the Confidence Package is Praesidium's minimum recommendation and the combination of searches provided by that package sometimes doesn't provide enough information for certain states.

For example, Kim says, "Massachusetts is one state that gives very little information. It's mostly just the sex offender registry information that's available for a database search, so we recommend that clients in Massachusetts run county level checks in every county the applicant has lived over the last seven years."

### **What county checks provide**

County background searches provide in-depth reporting accuracy necessary for churches to feel safe about hiring individuals who will be working with children and youth.

"Some states are good about reporting," says Aaron, "and for some positions, like volunteers with periodic and supervised access to youth, the Confidence Package is adequate. But we usually recommend that clients run individual checks for all of the counties where an applicant has lived. Doing so provides more accurate and more up-to-date information."

Running county checks can become costly if the applicant in question has lived in multiple counties. In those cases, Kim says, "We try to strike a balance to give churches the most accurate picture possible." Kim consults with customers to determine the best way to get the most information for the least cost.

“Sometimes we recommend county checks on a case-by-case basis, and other times there are statewide searches that are more economical,” she says.

Any Praesidium customer can reach out to them for help with interpreting a search report or creating a strategy for more effective background checks. Kim says, “Praesidium’s account managers will consult with clients and give them information about what is included in their state and what checks need to be added.

“Unfortunately,” she adds, “there’s no such thing as a perfect background check; we can only work off the information we’re given. But that’s why we provide additional checks—to give customers the most accurate picture possible.”

Remember that employment laws vary by state, so be sure to have your background check policies reviewed by legal counsel to avoid running afoul of applicable laws.