



## **Old Dominion Association of Church Schools**

### **Five Updates for Church-run Preschools and Daycares**

December 19, 2024

Dear Pastors and Administrators,

This memo includes updates on important topics related to our Religiously Exempt preschools and daycares. Our ministries have received several memoranda from the state in the past couple of weeks, and some of you have had some questions. You are encouraged to read this memo thoroughly and carefully. The government memos that are cited are attached with this update, in case you missed any of them. As always, please feel free to contact the ODACS office if you have any questions.

#### **1. New OBI Provider Portal – You must register a new account!**

On December 4, the Virginia Department of Social Services sent a memo informing our ministries that the Office of Background Investigations would be launching a new Central Registry Search Provider Portal. By way of reminder, the law requires Religiously Exempt preschools and daycares to conduct a Central Registry Search to see if an applicant has been reported for child abuse or neglect. According to the memo, each child care provider must create a new account as of December 9, because that was the date when OBI launched the new portal. Instructions for how to do so were included in the VDSS memo.

One of our ministries has had some difficulty getting a new account set up. A “Maintenance Alert” appears on the screen, indicating that the new portal is not fully functional yet. OBI has not yet responded to that ministry’s e-mail requesting assistance. Of course, late December is not a time when most of our ministries are hiring new staff; nevertheless, ODACS does advise that you try to set up a new account as soon as possible, and keep us informed if you have any problems. Despite the difficulty that you may encounter setting up a new account, we believe that you will still be able to use the online portal for fingerprint background checks.

#### **2. What if OBI does not process our Central Registry Search in a timely manner?**

This important question came up earlier this year when ODACS assisted one of our ministries with an appeal of safety violations for which the ministry had been cited by VDOE. The school had submitted Central Registry Searches on two or three employees, but the searches had never been completed by OBI. Remarkably, VDOE placed all of the responsibility on the school anyway. While we do not believe that this problem is common, here is what you need to do if you encounter it. If you do not hear from OBI within 30 days of submitting a Central Registry Search, submit it again, and every 30 days thereafter, until you finally get a result. Carefully document each submission, and include that documentation in your Religiously Exempt binder. If this procedure still does not satisfy your VDOE inspector, please feel free to contact the ODACS office.

### **3. Potable Water Testing Update**

On December 9, the Virginia Department of Education sent an update on the new Potable Water Testing requirement. As you already know, January 1, 2025, is the date when VDOE inspectors will begin verifying compliance with the new law. The December 9 memo did not include any new information, only reminders. Several ODACS ministries have been keeping us informed about their experience as they work to comply with the new law.

We still do not fully know what to expect in 2025, but here are two reminders to help you prepare. First, we do know that each tap that is tested will have to be tested twice. VDOE has stated this requirement expressly. ODACS has heard from several ministries that they had consulted with a lab which told them that once per tap was sufficient. However, that is different from the information that VDOE has published. If you have any questions about this particular matter, feel free to contact ODACS. Second, ODACS advises you to include your potable water testing documentation in your Religiously Exempt paperwork binder, near the top.

### **4. Child Abuse and Neglect Training**

On December 13, the Virginia Department of Education sent a memo offering newly updated training on recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. The Religious Exemption law does require that you train your preschool and daycare teachers annually with regard to the mandating reporting law. The VDOE training is not expressly required, but it is available if you are interested.

As a reminder, ODACS offers a workshop on mandated reporting of suspected child abuse, approaching the topic from both a legal and a Biblical perspective. Through the years I have had many opportunities to present this session both at the educators' convention and onsite at several ODACS schools. Please let me know if you are interested in scheduling a time for me to present this workshop to your teachers.

### **5. Enrolling a new Preschool or Daycare Child, New Requirement**

A few months ago, we learned that during the COVID virtual General Assembly, a new law was passed requiring Religiously Exempt preschools and daycares to obtain information about previous enrollment in daycare or preschool settings, in the same way that you would obtain previous enrollment in K-12 grades. One of our ministries was recently cited for a violation of this new requirement. This is an easy one to come into compliance with; you will just need to add another question to your preschool or daycare application form. To our knowledge, the law does include a requirement to contact previous daycares or preschools; it only requires collection of the previous enrollment information from the person seeking to enroll the child. The Code section for the new law is §22.1-289.049.

<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title22.1/chapter14.1/article8/#:~:text=§%2022.1%2D289.049..A>

Sincerely,

Dan Zacharias  
Executive Director