

Item H.205 Information

Subject: Comments on Overtures

As an entity of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board is permitted to provide communications and resource material to General Assembly commissioners as they consider items of business. These communications and resource material are referred to generically as “comments.”

Mission Agency Board Comments may be made on overtures, or on any other business that comes to the General Assembly, except for business submitted by the Mission Agency Board.

Comments:

- may not introduce new business.
- are always in relation to specific items of business, and may not express general concerns.
- are typically used to provide additional information to commissioners about existing work done by the Mission Agency, so that commissioner consideration of business proceeds with a full awareness of work that is already being done.
- may also advise commissioners of particular constraints on the work of the Mission Agency, so that commissioners are aware of the implications that would follow if a particular item of business were to be approved.
- are not voted upon by the General Assembly, instead they are read as commissioners consider the items at hand. Commissioners vote only on the recommendations.

Process:

- As overtures are published by the Office of the General Assembly, the Executive Director’s Office makes preliminary assignments to offices within the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Reports from other agencies or task forces and advocacy/advisory committees are reviewed in the Executive Director’s Office, unless the subject matter is directly related to a particular office.
- These offices make determinations on whether a comment from the Mission Agency might be useful to General Assembly commissioners and advisory delegates.
- If it is determined that a comment would be useful, then the office drafts a comment for review by the Executive Director’s Office.
- As comments are reviewed by the Executive Director’s Office, requests for clarification and/or additional comments may result.
- Once approved by the Executive Director’s Office, the comments are forwarded to the April meeting of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board prior to the General Assembly.
- Comments are then reviewed in Mission Agency Board committees based on their content. Subjects outside the purview of a particular committee are reviewed by the Executive Committee.

- These committees make recommendations regarding the comments to the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board. Once approved, the comments are forwarded to the General Assembly. (Note, while Mission Agency practice has been for the Mission Agency Board to approve all comments prior to submission to the General Assembly, in some of the other agencies, comments are a staff function.)

**The rules for “comments” derive from this excerpt from
the Standing Rules of the General Assembly (A.4.)**
(Underlines are for particular emphasis in this presentation.)

4. Communications and Resource Material

**Provide
Comment
or Advice**

a. Communications and resource material provide comment or advice on business already under consideration by the assembly and shall neither contain nor constitute business to be considered by the assembly. Communications may be directed to the General Assembly

(1) by entities of the General Assembly that desire to comment on a single item of business coming before the General Assembly from any source other than their own entity, but which do not introduce new business.

(2) by organizations in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) holds membership, and

(3) by other denominations in correspondence with the General Assembly.

**Forty-five
Day
Deadline**

b. All communications intended for consideration by the General Assembly shall be forwarded to the Stated Clerk, postmarked no later than forty-five days before the convening of the General Assembly.

**Resource
Materials**

c. Resource material (except for previously published books), including advice and counsel memoranda from advocacy and advisory committees, shall be prepared as necessary by entities of the General Assembly and shall not exceed 1,000 words on each item of business referred. This material shall be submitted to the Stated Clerk, postmarked no later than forty-five days before the convening of the assembly meeting, who shall then publish (print or electronic) and distribute the material to all commissioners prior to the assembly.

**Advice and
Counsel
Memoranda**

d. Advice and counsel memoranda are resources prepared by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns, and the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns for the purpose of providing information about existing policy, current work on specific topics, recent developments, and other factors useful to commissioners as they consider issues before the assembly.