

ITEM P.201
FOR INFORMATION

COMMENTS ON GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS ITEMS

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

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| Provide
Comment
or Advice | a. <u>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.</u> Communications may be directed to the General Assembly

(1) <u>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,</u>

(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. <u>Resource material</u> (except for previously published books), including advice and counsel memoranda from advocacy and advisory committees, <u>shall be prepared as necessary by entities of the General Assembly and shall not exceed 1,000 words on each item of business referred.</u> 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. |

Example:

In 2014, the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns submitted a recommendation to the General Assembly that would “direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency, in consultation with the Racial Ethnic Schools and Colleges Presidents Roundtable, to convene a racially diverse special task force of six people with expertise in the field of education to define and interpret the standards for racial ethnic schools related to the PC(USA).”

In response, the Mission Agency Board submitted a comment for commissioners to consider as they reviewed the recommendation:

The Presbyterian Mission Agency Board (PMAB) approved at its February 2014 meeting that the chairperson of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board “appoint a task force consisting of representatives from the Historically Presbyterian Racial Ethnic Institutions (HPREI) and representatives from other Presbyterian-related racial ethnic educational institutions. The task force will determine how the church can be true to its commitment to the HPREI, with whom it has

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covenanted, while considering how other racial ethnic educational institutions can be in relationship with the PC(USA) and be considered for support.”

The Presbyterian Mission Agency Board suggests that the resolution on defining and interpreting standards for PC(USA) racial ethnic schools and colleges from the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) be referred to the task force appointed by the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board chairperson, in order to avoid duplicative efforts. Both proposed task forces include many of the same people, and the work is similar. The task force appointed by the chairperson of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board will meet at the fall Racial Ethnic Schools and Colleges Presidents Roundtable meeting, which is included in the current PMAB budget, so there are minimal additional financial implications for the meeting of this task force. During this meeting, the task force will have the expertise and the time to complete the work assigned by the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board and the work in ACREC's resolution.

The Assembly Committee considered the recommendation from the Advocacy Committee and the comment from the Mission Agency, and instead of forming a new task force, referred this item to the existing Mission Agency Task Force, with a comment indicating that the Assembly would like to see at least six persons on the task force.

The result produced financial savings for the church, and allowed all parties to be heard by commissioners as they discerned how to respond.