I. Background Checks and Criminal Record

A. Professional Expectations

All Social Work students are required to complete new clearances prior to beginning field experiences. These courses include the Sophomore Field Placement SOWK 251 and 361 and the Senior Field Placement SOWK 490. Students will not be permitted to begin the Sophomore Field Placement or the Senior Field until all required clearances are submitted, returned, and reviewed by the Field Coordinator. Some agencies may require medical testing and drug screening prior to beginning placement. The completion of these additional requirements as well as all fees associated with them are the responsibility of the student. Students may be required by some agencies to complete clearances as a part of the first-year service learning experience in SOWK 120 Introduction to Social Work. These first-year clearances are coordinated through the Agape Center. Students taking SOWK 372 and SOWK 476 who have completed clearances at a maximum of two years prior will be required to provide verification that Criminal status has not changed since the previous records check. It is the student’s responsibility to immediately report to the Department any occurrence that could affect her/his Criminal Record or Child Abuse status. If a student is discovered to have an undisclosed criminal history that subsequently appears on an agency background check, this will suspend the placement process. The faculty of the Social Work Department will convene to consider next steps in the field placement process and determine the student's status in the program.

Prior to beginning any field engagement for SOWK 372 and SOWK 476, the student will complete the Criminal Record Status Verification Form and submit this to the Department. Students recognize that when clearances are completed for SOWK 490 Senior Field if a Criminal finding or Child Abuse report is found that dates back to the Criminal Record Status Verification and the student had not reported it, this will indicate that the student fabricated the status verification. The student will be immediately removed from the major and may only reapply the following year at the earliest.

B. Background Checks

In compliance with the Commonwealth of PA Older Adult Protective Services Act and the Chapter 63 of 23 PA Consolidated Statutes Annotated relating to the Child Protective Services law, Social Work students must complete the following clearances: PA Criminal History Record Check, PA Child Abuse History Clearance and FBI Fingerprint Record Check. The student who pursues a Social Work degree at Messiah College does so with the understanding that these clearances will need to be obtained and the results made known to the Social Work Department and Field Agencies. Progression in the Social Work major is conditional pending results of the criminal history background checks. Failure to comply with criminal background checks will prohibit progression in the Social Work major. All background check procedures and associated costs will be the responsibility of the student. Transportation to and from criminal background testing sites will be the responsibility of the student.

C. Criminal Record

The Messiah College Department of Social Work cannot guarantee placements for students who have been convicted of misdemeanors and/or felonies or are unable to pass Child
Abuse &/or Criminal History. The Department also cannot guarantee placements for students who for whatever reason are unable to pass health or drug and alcohol screenings.

A positive Criminal Record (Federal and/or State), and or positive Child Abuse History may result in any of the following: limitation of potential field placements, delay in placement, inability to obtain a field placement, dismissal from placement. A positive Criminal finding will be considered to the extent to which it relates to the student’s suitability for placement. If a criminal record is likely to preclude placement, the student will be notified.

A Social Work student with a Federal Criminal History Background check that indicates a status of ‘Disqualification’ will be unable to move into a field placement. Other criminal or abuse records will be reviewed by the Social Work Department to determine eligibility to work with vulnerable populations in accordance with the Child Protective Services Law and the Older Adults Protective Services Act. Any new charges after submission of the background check must be reported to the Social Work Department Chair and Field Coordinator immediately. The decision by the Social Work Department to permit a student, despite criminal convictions, to seek a field experience does not guarantee that the student will obtain that particular placement. Agencies reserve the right to not accept a student based on her/his criminal record.

D. Communication and Disclosure

Students in the Social Work Department recognize that a component of field participation requires allowing the Department to communicate with agencies related to placements. This includes communication related to Criminal findings or Child Abuse history. Students must provide to the Department and to the Field Agency, information adequate to assess the situation and the level of risk. This includes Criminal Background checks, Child Abuse Clearances, and FBI record checks when required. Students with a Criminal Record or Child Abuse background will also be expected to provide the Department and the Field Agency with a written statement about what occurred including the date, nature of the incident(s), criminal rulings and the context for what happened. Students should complete a FERPA release. However, a lack of FERPA release on file will not preclude the Department from communicating with field organizations regarding a student’s background status. The level of disclosure required of students to the Department and subsequently to Field Agencies is necessary due to student engagement with vulnerable populations and the risk and liability being assumed by placing students in a field setting. This information is required to assess and minimize risk.

The student who pursues a Social Work degree at Messiah College does so with the understanding that these clearances will need to be obtained and the results made known to the Social Work Department and Field Agencies. Progression in the Social Work major is conditional pending results of the criminal history background checks. Failure to comply with Criminal Background checks will prohibit progression in the Social Work major. All background check procedures and associated costs will be the responsibility of the student. Transportation to and from criminal background testing sites will be the responsibility of the student.

II. Instructions for Completion of Clearances

Internet access is required for students to complete the clearance process and to download certain forms and instructions. Links have been provided for the completion of these clearances. Please follow the instructions provided to ensure that the process is completed correctly. Allow sufficient time for clearances to be processed prior to beginning placements. The time for clearances to be returned following the application process varies and must be taken into
consideration when beginning the process. Students should not expect to begin a placement without proof of clearance completion.

**All** students must complete the following clearances:
- Child Abuse clearance
- PA State Police Check

In addition, **non-Pennsylvania residents** need to complete
- FBI (Cogent) Fingerprinting Check.
  
  To be recognized as a Pennsylvania resident you must have lived in the state for two years immediately preceding the placement.

### A. Child Abuse Clearance

[https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home](https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home)

Please note that in order to proceed in filling out the online Child Abuse Clearance Application, you must create an account. At the start of the account form, you will be asked to fill in a Keystone ID. It is not readily obvious, but when setting up your account, you need to make up a Keystone ID of your choice. After you have set up an account, you will be given a temporary password through email, and then log in again to create your personal password. This online form requests personal information, including extensive address history. The completed on-line form is sent directly to the department of welfare, and typically takes less than 14 days to process. You will receive an email response of the outcome of your clearance. At that point, you may log in where you will be given an option to have the results sent to your home address, and again, you will need to include this with your other two clearances. This requires a credit card for payment.

### B. PA State Police Criminal Background Check

[https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp](https://epatch.state.pa.us/Home.jsp)

This is the Pennsylvania State Police check which can be processed online and the results typically are available immediately or within the same business day. You will need to print the clearance results to include with the other two clearances. You do not receive a paper copy of this clearance from the PA State Police. Please follow the directions after completing the application process and print out the certificate. If you close out the page or use the back arrow, your results may no longer be available. Please use caution while finishing this process to ensure success. This requires a credit card for payment.

### C. FBI Clearances

(FBI Fingerprint Clearance (IDENTOGO) Instructions Rev. 1/22/18)

The FBI check is a **three-step process**.

**First**, you must register online and print the receipt *(See instructional steps below to register.)*

**Second**, take the receipt, 2 forms of ID, and payment method (credit card or money order) to a fingerprinting facility.

**Third**, after providing the fingerprints at the facility, the results will be mailed to the home address that you entered online when you registered.

When you register online, there will be an opportunity to set up your specific fingerprinting appointment. There is also the option of selecting ‘walk-in’ for which you take the chance that they will be able to see you sooner. Be sure to check out the hours of operation before
proceeding to a fingerprint location. Scheduled appointments are given priority over walk-ins.
Fingerprinting sites and hours are listed online.
Local sites include:

- 6483 Carlisle Pike, Suite 104, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050
- 158 W. High Street Carlisle, PA 17013
- 4815 Jonestown Road, Suite 201, Harrisburg, PA 17109

A credit card or money order is required for payment. The cost is $22.60

**Instructional Steps:**
1. Go to: [https://uenroll.identogo.com](https://uenroll.identogo.com)
2. Enter the following Service Code: 1KG756
3. Select ‘Schedule or Manage Appointment’
4. Fill in requested information on each screen and click ‘next’ to proceed to next screen.
5. Schedule an appointment date, time, and location (or you may choose ‘walk-in’).
6. **Print the Registration Complete page with the Registration ID included.** (You will also receive an email confirmation)
7. Go to the fingerprint site as scheduled. You are required to have with you the Registration code from the confirmation email and qualified State or Federal photo ID (example: driver’s license). A credit card or money order is required for payment.
8. Results will be mailed to you within 2-4 weeks.
9. When you receive the report, retain copies of the clearance:
   Students will not be permitted to start placement until verification of all required clearances are provided. When a student receives clearance results, she/he should save them and retain all originals. Students are required to provide copies of all clearances to Field Coordinator and respective placement agencies.

**III. Disclaimer**

If the student completes the Social Work program at Messiah College and obtains a BSW degree, the student will be eligible for licensure or credentialing by a governing body or will be eligible to work for a particular employer. Licensure and credentialing authorities and employers apply their own standards for evaluating whether criminal convictions are disqualifying based on state laws and facility-specific regulations. Messiah College and the Social Work Department accept no liability in cases where a third party deems criminal convictions sufficiently serious to cause denial of the applicable license or credential, or to refuse employment opportunities.