



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** UUA Co-Moderators, Rev. Kimberly Quinn Johnson & Bill Young

**From:** Vice President for Programs & Ministries, Rev. Ashley Horan and Deputy Director of Ministries & Faith Development and Executive Secretary to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, Rev. Cecilia Kingman

**Re:** Anticipated Impacts of Proposed Bylaw Amendment “Authority to Suspend or Place a Minister’s Search on Hold” on Ministerial Fellowship Committee members and UUA Staff

**Date:** June 10, 2026

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The following memo has been prepared by UUA staff at the request of the UUA Co-Moderators, to analyze the impacts of the proposed bylaw amendment on the business agenda for General Assembly 2026: “Authority to Suspend or Place a Minister’s Search on Hold.” The Review Team is a function of the programmatic areas reporting to Rev. Ashley Horan and is convened by Rev. Kingman as Executive Secretary of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee.

## INTRODUCTION

The UUA administers the system of search for congregational placements for ministers through an annual cycle for settled, contract, transitional, and interim ministers. Ministers can currently be placed “on hold” for a limited time and prevented from participating in the UUA’s search and settlement system when there is a question about whether the minister is equipped to have a safe, healthy ministry in another setting in the future. A minister can be placed on hold by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) itself or by the UUA’s Review Team, under the authority accorded to that team by [MFC Rule 22](#). The MFC also places ministers on hold when they are under investigation for misconduct, or when the MFC is conducting a Fellowship Review of the minister.

The Review Team is made up of senior staff from the UUA’s Congregational Life (CL) and Ministries & Faith Development (MFD) staff groups. Staff review documentation after a minister has experienced a negotiated resignation, a conflicted ending to a ministry, or is leaving a congregation after exhibiting concerning patterns of behavior in multiple ministry contexts. Based on that review, staff can refer ministers to the care of

the Review Team to address the remaining concerns prior to reentering search. The MFC can also place ministers in care of the team. For more specifics about the Review Team's current scope of authority and processes, [click here](#).

The [proposed bylaw amendment](#) specifies that only the MFC itself would have authority to place a minister on hold from the UUA's search and settlement process. If passed, this bylaw amendment would impact the work and responsibilities of both the MFC and UUA staff. It would require a different procedure for review of ministerial departures, which could increase the timeline for ministers on hold.

We recognize that being on hold can have serious consequences for ministers. Across the Review Team, we are currently reviewing our procedures and practices to increase the effectiveness and timeliness of the review process. These updates are a priority of our new Director of Ministries and Faith Development, Rev. Dr. Rebekah Savage. This memo is geared towards the Review process as it currently operates, and how that process would be affected by the proposed bylaw amendment. We, the UUA staff responsible for supporting our ministers and congregations, remain open to conversation with the Board, MFC and stakeholders about ways to improve the review system going forward to meet its goals.

## **CURRENT REVIEW TEAM STRUCTURE, PROCESS, AND TIMELINES**

The Review Team currently meets once a month. Team members handle initial contact with ministers and then manage ongoing communication with the ministers in their care. (Ministers do not meet directly with the full Review Team). These communications can include describing the Review Team's "in care" process, answering questions, providing support, and in addition staff read materials for submission and keep records. Team members then present ministers' paperwork and progress to the rest of the team. The team approach ensures a variety of perspectives in key decision making and provides sufficient capacity to address the number of ministers in care. There are currently twenty ministers actively in process, which is the average number at any given time.

Ministers who move with focus and intention through the Review Team process usually can do so within a matter of months. Some ministers need or want more time for healing, reflection, and/or skill development to address challenges that arose during their previous ministries. In these cases, the process can take longer, up to 3 years, according to Review Team policy. When a minister does submit their paperwork, which includes a Reflective Essay and a Personal & Professional Development Plan, the Review Team endeavors to make a decision about the minister's hold status within 1-2 months.

Those who do not complete the process within the allotted three years, typically because they have chosen not to engage the process, are to be referred back to the MFC for fellowship review per policy. The Review Team is currently in the process of reaching out to several ministers on hold who have been inactive or otherwise stalled

beyond the allowable three years, before referring those ministers to the MFC.

## **POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF PROPOSED BYLAW AMENDMENT**

If passed, the proposed bylaw amendment would compel the UUA Board of Trustees to approve a rule change to MFC Rule 22, which establishes the Review Team and its role and scope of authority. A rule change could either eliminate the Review Team entirely, thus placing full responsibility on the volunteer members of the MFC for the in-care process currently stewarded by UUA staff who compose the Review Team, or require a multi-stage process in which the Review Team would provide recommendations to the MFC about placing ministers on hold for review and approval.

### **MFC Members**

The MFC has seen a measurable increase in their workload over the last several years, including creating more relational and restorative systems with ministerial candidates and those in the renewal process for preliminary fellowship, as well as a substantial increase in misconduct cases. Misconduct cases have increased due to several factors, including changes in UUMA guidelines and parameters of misconduct, an increase in trust from those who have experienced harm that the UUA will take their complaints seriously, and the long shadow of the trauma of COVID which led to high levels of burnout in religious professionals. Prior to 2016, the MFC averaged approximately one fellowship review a year; between 2016-17 and 2024-25, the MFC conducted between 1-3 fellowship reviews per year. There have been 7 fellowship reviews in 2025-26.

The workload for MFC members is one of the highest among volunteer UUA boards and committees. All members of the MFC spend many hours preparing for each of the three annual MFC meetings; this includes reading 1,000-1,500 total pages of candidate packets and other documents before each meeting. Each of these three MFC meetings spans 4-5 days of full-time service. Additionally, MFC members have regular meetings for working groups and the Executive Committee, and regular trainings to attend.

MFC members are all volunteers, most of whom have full time jobs, families, and other commitments. The addition of the Review Team's current case load and processes to the MFC's regular scope of work would necessitate the creation of a new Working Group or the addition of Review cases to the load of one of the existing Working Groups. To maintain the current pace of Review Team process and decisions, we estimate the MFC would need to add 2-5 hours/month (24-60 hours/year) of work to the responsibilities of members of the Working Group that would take on this responsibility. Given the already time-heavy demands of MFC service, this could create challenges to volunteer retention and recruitment with increased responsibilities, and probable delays for ministers awaiting a decision on their status.

### **UUA Staff**

UUA's CL and MFD staff interact most closely with ministers and congregations throughout the duration of a specific ministry, from search to ministerial start-up to regular check-ins to crisis interventions and supports, through a minister's departure.

Because of our ongoing relationships with both ministers and congregations, the UUA's Congregational Life and Ministries & Faith Development staff are also able to observe patterns across a minister's career in multiple different ministry settings. Given these ongoing relationships across time and contexts, UUA staff have unique perspectives and analysis, which helps identify needed areas of growth and potential future pitfalls for both ministers and congregations. In recognition of this unique expertise, UUA staff can recommend to the Review Team that a minister be placed on hold, or to Congregational Life staff that a congregation be placed into Special Care status.

If this bylaw passed and the MFC were to take on the Review Team's responsibilities, this would affect the current mechanism for UUA staff to raise concerns about ministers' ability to move healthfully and skillfully into future ministries. As MFC members are not involved in day-to-day relationships with ministers and/or congregations in the way UUA staff are, the MFC would need to create a mechanism and additional data infrastructure for collating information from UUA staff and ministers' current and past experiences. The MFC would need to be notified of all negotiated resignations, conflicted departures, and/or patterns of problematic ministerial behavior across settings so they can evaluate the potential need for care of the Review Team.

## **CONCLUSION**

The UUA staff, alongside our partners on the Board and MFC, are committed to following the requirements of the UUA Bylaws. If this amendment were to pass, it could lead to interruptions and delays in the ability of the UUA to address concerns with UU ministers in transition, and would require substantial investments in internal systems and volunteer capacity.