

Authorized and assigned by action of the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention, the Sexual Abuse Task Force now reports to the 2022 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention the following requests and recommendations for action. On behalf of the Task Force, I move the adoption of these requests to our broader SBC family:

**First, with respect to Baptist polity, the Task Force addresses the following suggestions and requests to cooperating state conventions, SBC entities, and other related Baptist bodies:**

Challenges for our entities and other Baptist bodies:

1. We request that the Executive Committee evaluate staffing needs for the Credentials Committee, and also hire a designated, trained staff person or independent contractor to receive reports of abuse for the purpose of determining the appropriate church, entity, or association to respond to those allegations, and to assist the Credentials Committee as needed.
2. We request all entity boards and standing committees have training regarding sexual abuse prevention and survivor care as part of their orientation and selection. We further request that the Committee on Nominations complete background checks for every trustee nominated to entity boards and standing committees.
3. We request that Send Relief contribute a minimum of \$3 million to the sexual abuse reforms allocation for the first year. We request the Executive Committee be the stewards of the allocation, in consultation with the ARITF, to fund the sexual abuse recommendations adopted by the Convention.
4. We request that all denominational workers, volunteers, and students in all entities are given training on sexual abuse prevention and survivor care.
5. We encourage all churches and Baptist bodies to participate in the SBC sexual abuse assessment.<sup>1</sup>

Challenges for State Conventions:

1. We request that state conventions consider having a designated, trained staff person or independent contractor to receive calls regarding allegations of sexual abuse and provide initial guidance. We request this person be trained in trauma to be able to assist both survivors and churches and will be able to assist submitters who may need help in filing an allegation report with the appropriate party.
2. We request that state conventions, in consultation with Lifeway and the Executive Committee, add a series of questions on the Annual Church Profile regarding background checks and sexual abuse training.

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<sup>1</sup> The SBC Sexual Abuse Assessment is a voluntary initiative designed to hear from survivors, pastors, and lay people to understand how churches have dealt with the issue of sexual abuse. The ERLC is leading this initiative.

3. We request that state conventions maintain a list of professionally trained, licensed, trauma-informed Christian counselors in their respective states for those churches who voluntarily seek assistance as they minister to survivors.
4. We request that state conventions establish a self-certification program for churches, including “best practices” in survivor care, hiring, investigatory protocols, and training for prevention.
5. We request all state entities and committees provide training regarding sexual abuse prevention and survivor care to their denominational workers, as well as background checks, as part of their orientation and selection.

**Second, given the need for structural and meaningful changes in the SBC, the Sexual Abuse Task Force recommends the following actions for approval by messengers:**

**Recommendation One:**

That the messengers to the 2022 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention approve the creation of an Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force (ARITF), authorized to operate for one year, to be renewable by each subsequent annual convention as needed. The ARITF is to be appointed by the president elected by the 2022 Convention, who will also appoint its leadership. Any vacancies will be appointed by the SBC president at the time of the vacancy. The ARITF and its work are to be funded by the Executive Committee for the first year from the sexual abuse reform allocation. The Executive Committee will fund the ARITF’s expenditures and recommendations, pursuant to the recommendations adopted by the Messengers, the approval of which may not be withheld. The ARITF will work collaboratively with entity heads to recommend funding mechanisms for reforms for following years. The ARITF will report to each annual session of the Convention that it is in existence.

Specifically, the ARITF will be charged to:

1. Study the Guidepost recommendations for feasibility and bring an initial report to the 2023 annual meeting on which reforms could be adopted by the convention and how they should be implemented, including Guidepost’s recommendations for a survivor care fund and a memorial, auditing the Caring Well curriculum, and the possible creation of a permanent committee or entity.
2. Assist SBC entities in studying the recommendations from Guidepost and provide advice on voluntary implementation of reforms relevant to each entity’s ministry assignment.
3. Serve as a resource in abuse prevention, crisis response, and survivor care to Baptist bodies who voluntarily seek assistance. Such assistance may include providing a list of recommended independent, qualified firms<sup>2</sup> for training and inquiries and will include assisting state conventions with any of the recommendations each chooses, as the state conventions request.

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<sup>2</sup> A qualified firm is a firm which operates under the relevant state licensures and ethics codes for investigative entities in the jurisdictions where they operate, and whose members are in good standing with the ethics boards related to all professional licenses which are held (for example, private investigative licenses, attorney licenses, etc). A qualified firm maintains a dedicated practice area for investigations and assessments related to sexual abuse and harassment, and utilizes a team which is professionally trained in trauma-informed investigative techniques and practices.

4. In consultation with the Credentials Committee, revise the evaluation and submission process<sup>3</sup> for complaints of noncooperation due to sexual abuse and publish those revisions. For example, when a church acts in a manner that is inconsistent with the Convention’s beliefs regarding sexual abuse,<sup>4</sup> such as showing an unwillingness to cooperate in an inquiry of an accused individual, then the church shall be submitted to the SBC Credentials Committee for consideration in accordance with SBC Bylaw 8.<sup>5</sup>
5. Work with the Executive Committee and Credentials Committee to select an independent, qualified firm or firms to assist the Credentials Committee by providing factual findings<sup>6</sup> for complaints of noncooperation due to sexual abuse. The ARITF will report back any actions to the 2023 annual meeting regarding this selection. This expense shall be funded by the sexual abuse reform allocation.

**Rationale:** Over the course of the EC investigation, it has become clear to the Sexual Abuse Task Force that the process of implementing meaningful change in the Southern Baptist Convention in the area of sex abuse is beyond the scope of this current Task Force.

### **Recommendation Two:**

That the messengers to the 2022 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention authorizes the ARITF, in coordination with the Executive Committee, to create a “Ministry Check” website<sup>7</sup> and process for maintaining a record of pastors, denominational workers, ministry employees, and volunteers who have at any time been credibly accused<sup>8</sup> of sexual abuse<sup>9</sup> and who have been or are associated with a cooperating Southern Baptist church or entity. The website will be established and maintained through

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<sup>3</sup> This includes recommendations on standard principles of cooperation, consistent with the Convention’s beliefs regarding sexual abuse, by which a church may be deemed to be in friendly cooperation with the SBC, as well as an explanation of a clear reporting process, assessment standards, record-keeping procedures, processes for non-cooperating churches to rectify areas of non-cooperation, and an appeals process for submitters. The standard principles of cooperation and process shall be published publicly.

<sup>4</sup> SBC Constitution, Article III.1.4.

<sup>5</sup> SBC Bylaw 8 C (4) – If a church which has been found not to be in cooperation with the Convention addresses the issues which led to that finding, it may apply to the Credentials Committee for a reconsideration of its status. If the circumstances warrant, the Credentials Committee may recommend to the Executive Committee that the church be once again considered a cooperating church.

<sup>6</sup> Inquiries shall not be investigations which exercise authority over any local church or state convention or local association, in accordance with SBC Constitution Article IV and SBC Bylaw 8. The firm’s inquiries would only be related to matters of sexual abuse and would be reported to the Credentials Committee without making any recommendations. The firm would provide a written factual report to the Credentials Committee which preserves victim and witness identities. The Credentials Committee would then form an opinion using the factual report and other information available to the Committee.

<sup>7</sup> A disclaimer will appear on the website that the list is not exhaustive and is for informational purposes only.

<sup>8</sup> A credibly accused pastor, denominational worker, or ministry employee or volunteer includes one who has confessed in a non-privileged setting, who has been convicted in a court of law, or who has had a civil judgment rendered against them. Additionally, an independent third party who has been hired by any church or other Baptist body, may determine, by preponderance of the evidence following an inquiry, that a pastor, denominational worker, or ministry employee or volunteer is credibly accused. A “preponderance of the evidence” is the legal standard required for a civil judgment.

<sup>9</sup> Sexual abuse is defined as any sexual act that could result in criminal charges or civil liability in the jurisdiction where it occurred.

an independent, qualified firm, selected by the Credentials Committee in consultation with the ARITF and to be funded by the sexual abuse reforms allocation. The following are grounds for submission:

1. Names of pastors, denominational workers, or ministry employees or volunteers<sup>10</sup> who have been associated with a cooperating Southern Baptist church or entity and who have been convicted or had a civil judgment against them for sexual abuse. The ARITF will perform an annual audit of these names to ensure the website is as complete as possible.
2. Names of pastors, denominational workers, or ministry employees or volunteers who have been associated with a cooperating Southern Baptist church or entity, where a qualified, independent firm has performed an inquiry<sup>11</sup> into the allegations and determined that the individual in question has been credibly accused by a preponderance of the evidence. These inquiries will be initiated by the relevant local church or other Baptist body.
3. Upon submission of an allegation to the Ministry Check administrator, the administrator will examine the supporting documentation to ensure that the standard of “credibly accused” has been met according to the requirements set forth herein. In cases where a name is submitted for which there is no conviction, civil judgment, or documented qualified-third party inquiry, the administrator will route the allegation to the relevant church or Baptist body for the commission of an inquiry. Where the relevant church or Baptist body is unable to engage an independent, qualified firm for an inquiry of an accused individual based on financial need, and the related local association and/or state convention are unable to assist the church or Baptist body in engaging an independent firm for an inquiry, then, the church may apply for a grant<sup>12</sup> to cover the cost for all reasonable and supported accusations.

**Rationale:** According to the U.S. Department of Justice, sexual offenders have an 80% recidivism rate.<sup>13</sup> One of the problems in our churches is the ability of abusers to move from one church to another to perpetuate their abuse. This often happens because churches don’t have the means to communicate with one another. This recommendation is designed to give local churches and Baptist bodies a critical tool to identify sexual offenders and prevent sexual abuse; the effectiveness of Ministry Check depends upon the voluntary cooperation of churches and entities within the SBC.

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<sup>10</sup> All allegations will first be routed to the relevant local church or Baptist body, including any volunteer who is accused while volunteering for an SBC entity.

<sup>11</sup> The inquiries for use in the Ministry Check database are inquiries into an accused individual, not into a church.

<sup>12</sup> The ARITF will establish and publish a process for grant application. Grants will be provided through the sexual abuse reform allocation. If the funds in the allocation are exhausted, any pending grant requests for inquiries will roll to the next fiscal year.

<sup>13</sup> "Lifetime Sex Offender Recidivism: A 25-Year Follow-Up Study," *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Volume: 46 Issue: 5, October 2004, pages 531-552, as cited by U.S. Department of Justice, accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/lifetime-sex-offender-recidivism-25-year-follow-study>.