

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 that, for implementation of sexual abuse reforms for the first year, the Executive Committee recommend to the Messengers of the 2022 SBC annual meeting that \$3 million be allocated from Cooperate Program overage and from a portion of the Vision 2025 budget.
3. 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 appointed to entity boards and standing committees.
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.¹

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.
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.

¹ 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 and has secured Guidepost Solutions as the appropriate firm to independently carry out this work.

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 three-year term. The ARITF is to be appointed by the president elected by the 2022 Convention, who will also appoint its leadership. The ARITF is to be funded by the sexual abuse allocation requested by the Executive Committee, but shall operate with full independence. The ARITF will report to each annual session of the Convention, with a first report to be submitted to the Convention in 2023 and a final report in 2025.

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 firms for training and inquiries and will include assisting state conventions with any of the recommendations each chooses, as the state conventions request. The ARITF will also seek to assist submitters who may need help in filing an allegation report with the appropriate party.
4. In consultation with the Credentials Committee, revise the evaluation and submission process² for complaints of noncooperation due to sexual abuse and publish those revisions.
5. Work with the Executive Committee and Credentials Committee to select an independent firm or firms to assist the Credentials Committee by providing factual findings³ 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 allocation requested by the Executive Committee.

² 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.

³ Inquiries shall not be investigations which exercise authority over any local church or state 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.

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” website⁴ and process for maintaining a record of pastors, denominational workers, ministry employees, and volunteers who have at any time been credibly accused⁵ of sexual abuse.⁶ The website will be established and maintained through an independent firm, selected by the Credentials Committee in consultation with the ARITF, and funded by the sexual abuse allocation requested by the Executive Committee. The following parties will be permitted to submit names for entry:

1. Leadership of a church or other Baptist body may submit to the Ministry Check administrator names of pastors, denominational workers, or ministry employees and volunteers who have been associated with a cooperating Southern Baptist church 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. Leadership of a church or other Baptist body may submit to the Ministry Check administrator names of pastors, denominational workers, or ministry employees and volunteers who have been directly involved in their ministry, and which an independent firm has determined to be credibly accused following an inquiry.⁷
3. Where a church or other Baptist body is unable⁸ or unwilling to engage an independent firm for an inquiry of an accused individual, and the related local or state associations are unable to assist the church or Baptist body in engaging an independent firm for an inquiry, then, upon submission to the Ministry Check administrator, the sexual abuse allocation requested by the Executive Committee will cover the cost of an independent firm to determine the credibility of all reasonable and supported accusations.

Rationale: Statistics show that sexual offenders have an 80% recidivism rate.⁹ 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.

⁴ A disclaimer will appear on the website that the list is not exhaustive and is for informational purposes only.

⁵ 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” means “more likely than not.”

⁶ Sexual abuse is defined as any sexual act that would result in criminal charges or civil liability in the jurisdiction where it occurred.

⁷ The inquiries for use in the Ministry Check database are inquiries into an accused individual, not into a church.

⁸ “Unable” means that the church or Baptist body has demonstrated financial need or no longer exists as an SBC Baptist body.

⁹ <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/lifetime-sex-offender-recidivism-25-year-follow-study>.