

Dear Members of the Tennessee General Assembly:

As the president of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, the head of the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, and a group of concerned Middle Tennessee pastors, we are writing to help articulate the perspective of our churches. In Tennessee, upward of 20 percent of the populace identifies as Southern Baptist. The members of these churches who gather weekly across the state care deeply about life and the protection of all people made in the image of God. They believe in protecting innocent children from violence and struggling people from self-harm.

Thus, we are writing to urge you to act to support Governor Bill Lee's proposal to strengthen our state's order of protection laws to protect the broader population from those who are a danger to themselves or others. His framework is a thoughtful approach to ensure we protect the constitutional rights of citizens while also helping to protect potential victims from dangerous individuals. Allowing law enforcement to work with loved ones in order to lead a process that involves full due process in the judicial system, this will ensure individuals who could cause great harm are temporarily kept from accessing weapons, protecting them and others from potential tragedy.

Southern Baptists believe that "God has spoken clearly throughout Scripture to the value and dignity of every human being as created in the image of God" ("[On the Imago Dei](#)," Resolution adopted at the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention.) From its very first chapter, Genesis 1, through the rest of its pages, this truth resonates throughout the Bible. As a people who believe in the authority of the Scripture, it informs our approach to every public policy issue.

As Bible-believing Christians, we further believe that government is ordained by God to be His servant in matters of justice, protecting the vulnerable from those who do evil (Romans 13:1-7).

As Americans, we also concur with the ideals of the founders that the proper role of government is to protect the life and liberty of its citizens.

Building on these beliefs, at its 2018 annual meeting, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution entitled, "[On Gun Violence and Mass Shootings](#)." In that resolution, the SBC expressed its grief over "the epidemic of gun violence resulting in mass shootings across America," praised the heroism of law enforcement officers and first responders, and "call[ed] on federal, state, and local authorities to implement preventative measures that would reduce gun violence and mass shootings while operating in accordance with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution." Governor Lee's proposal does that.

Recognizing that this "epidemic" had not improved, at the SBC 2022 annual meeting, Southern Baptists once again addressed this issue in a resolution entitled, "[On the Imago Dei](#)." Reaffirming the sentiments of the 2018 resolution, they "pray[ed] for our local, state, and federal leaders to recognize the seriousness of the ongoing threat of mass shootings throughout our society and to take concrete steps, toward solutions that uphold the dignity and value of every

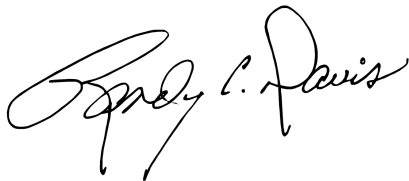
human life, especially the most vulnerable among us, and to minimize the threat of gun violence throughout our society.” Governor Lee’s proposal does that.

Further, in several places, the 2022 resolution affirmed the worth and value of all people. Those suffering from mental illness, even those who may have violent propensities, are made in the image of God and to value them means to protect them from self-harm as well as to take action to protect others from those that seek to inflict harm. Governor Lee’s proposal does that.

Sadly, as last month’s Covenant School shooting tragically reminded us, these are not issues that take place “somewhere else.” As Tennesseans, we urge the Legislature to pursue policies that help protect the vulnerable from harm in our great state. As Southern Baptists, we want to see the government take steps to help end this “epidemic of gun violence.” Governor Lee’s proposal does that.

As an elected member of the Legislature, you now have an incredible opportunity before you. We have great confidence in you as you face this pivotal moment and have the opportunity to advance the cause of protecting the vulnerable citizens who are your charge. This action is desperately needed.

Respectfully,



Randy C. Davis
President, Tennessee Baptist Mission Board



F. Brent Leatherwood
President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention
Nashville, TN



Mike Glenn
Senior Pastor, Brentwood Baptist Church
Brentwood, TN

Aaron Bryant
Campus and Teaching Pastor, The Church at Avenue South
Nashville, TN

David Freeman
Pastor, First Baptist Church
Lebanon, Tennessee

Steve Freeman
Senior Pastor, Grace Baptist Church
Springfield, TN

Robby Gallaty
Senior Pastor, Long Hollow Church
Hendersonville, TN

Wade Owen
Campus and Teaching Pastor, The Church at Nolensville
Nolensville, TN

Nathan Parker
Senior Pastor, Woodmont Baptist Church
Nashville, TN

Matt Pearson
Campus and Teaching Pastor, The Church at West Franklin
Franklin, TN

Ronny Raines
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church Clarksville
Clarksville, TN

Mark Satterfield
Senior Pastor, The Glade Church
Mount Juliet, TN

Brandt Waggoner
Lead Pastor, Fairview Church
Lebanon, TN

Although not Tennessee Baptists, the following non-Tennessee Baptist ministers also add their support:

Ben Anderson
Lead Pastor, Christ Church Nashville
Nashville, TN

Clay Stauffer
Senior Minister, Woodmont Christian Church
Nashville, TN

Darren Whitehead
Senior Pastor, Church of the City
Franklin, TN