

Statement from Leaders, Advisors and Advocates in the Southern Baptist Convention.

As individuals who have worked alongside the Southern Baptist Convention in abuse reform or held positions of past or current leadership in the Convention related to abuse reform, we come together to express our deep grief at the Amicus Brief filed on behalf of the Convention, Lifeway Publishing, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the SBC Executive Committee, opposing the application of sexual assault Statute of Limitations Reform to institutions.

This brief and the policy arguments made in it, were made without our knowledge and without our approval. Moreover, they do not represent our values and positions.

It has long been recognized that access to the justice system is a fundamental part of identifying and stopping abusers, as well as creating lasting, effective reform to protect the next generation. By taking this stand against access to the justice system, the leaders who approved this position have joined with the Catholic Church, powerful insurance companies, Michigan State University, and many others who have sought to close the halls of our courts to survivors of abuse. And it was a choice to stand against every survivor in Kentucky.

In any legal case, there may be valid factual questions to assess regarding individual or institutional liability, but opposing Statute of Limitations reform related to institutions is not an effort to honestly consider the facts and questions related to responsibility. Rather, it is a deliberate effort to ensure those questions are never asked. Revising the Statute of Limitations does not alter the burden of proof, it does not impact evidentiary rules, it does not change laws regarding institutional responsibility. It simply allows survivors access to the justice system so that a full and fair hearing on the merits can take place.

In past years, the SBC has pledged to stand against sexual abuse, and passed a resolution which read in part that the SBC desires to “publicly lament the harm our actions and inactions have caused survivors.” This choice was not a choice to lament, it was an attempt to ensure survivor voices are not heard in the court room.

The Resolution reads that the SBC asks “forgiveness from survivors for our failure to care well for survivors,” yet those leaders who approved this brief have sided with institutions long known for enabling abusers, making the same arguments that have hurt so many victimized by sexual abuse.

The Resolution states that the SBC apologizes “for our institutional responses which have prioritized the reputation of our institutions over protection of and justice for survivors...”. Yet this brief seeks to ensure, once again, that the institution is prioritized and questions of justice are shut out.

Another Resolution states “[t]hat we ask civil authorities, in the implementation of due process for the accused, to review laws, in consultation with social workers and trauma counselors, to ensure ... that statutes of limitations (criminal and civil) do not unduly protect perpetrators of sexual abuse and individuals who enabled them...” Yet this brief seeks to undermine those very legislative efforts the messengers asked civil authorities to implement.

Moreover, we are also dismayed that some leaders financed this work and chose in secret to take this stand and make the same argument as the Catholic Church, Michigan State University and insurance companies, proactively involving themselves in a case that has nothing to do with the Southern Baptist Convention.

We are deeply grieved to see this position taken, and as those who have worked alongside or in the Convention and publicly supported where positive steps have been taken, we must be equally clear in our perspective on this step. We remain committed to supporting leaders, survivors and individuals in the Convention who are engaged in the long process of true reform and hope to see this change spread deeper in the future.

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