

# Federal judge rules for victims, survivors of Texas church massacre

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (The Baptist Paper and local reports) – A federal judge on Feb. 7 ordered the U.S. Air Force to pay \$230 million in damages to members of First Church, Sutherland Springs, Texas, where a former service member killed 26 churchgoers and wounded 22 others in a mass shooting during a Sunday morning worship service on Nov. 5, 2017.

The gunman, Devin Patrick Kelley, had served in the Air Force. He died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound following a police chase after the massacre.

Records show Kelley pleaded guilty to multiple charges of assault during his time in the military and was subsequently discharged from the Air Force. Under Pentagon rules, information about convictions of military personnel in crimes such as assault is supposed to be submitted to the FBI's Criminal Justice Investigation Services Division for inclusion in the National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) database.

For unspecified reasons, the Air Force did not provide the information about Kelley as required and he was able to purchase the weapons used in the shooting when a legally-required background check did not turn up the guilty pleas.

Kelley's wife Danielle told the San Antonio Express-News newspaper in 2018 that her husband tied her to their bed before picking up his weapons and leaving for the church.

Some law enforcement officials have said they believe Kelley went to the church to kill his mother-in-law, who often intervened in fights between the couple. She was not at the church the morning of the massacre.



## Rodriguez

U.S. District Judge Xavier Rodriguez of Western District of Texas in San Antonio, an appointee of Republican U.S. President George W. Bush and former member of the Texas Supreme Court, ruled in July that the Air Force was 60% liable for the attack because of the failure to report Kelley's convictions.

Rodriguez also previously served in the Judge Advocate General Corps of the U.S. Army Reserve. Including survivors and family members of the deceased, there are around 80 claimants in all.

Jamal Alsaffar, the attorney who represented the victims and their families, told The Associated Press, "These families are the heroes here. While no amount can bring back the many lives lost or destroyed at the hands of the government's negligence, their bravery in obtaining this verdict will make this country safer by helping ensure that this type of governmental failure does not happen in our country again,".

Church members voted in August of last year to demolish the building where the shootings occurred, after Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board spearheaded an effort to construct a new building. An open air memorial on the site is being planned

Read more about the church's recovery from the shooting [here](#) and [here](#).