Miss. Baptist leaders send open letter to SBC Executive Committee

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

Nearly 100 Mississippi Baptist leaders have signed an open letter to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee urging trustees to resolve ongoing disagreements that are stalling an independent investigation into the handling of sexual abuse matters by Committee staffers.

Messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting in June by majority vote directed SBC President Ed Litton, lead pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., to appoint a Sexual Abuse Task Force to look into allegations that Executive Committee staffers have not been properly addressing complaints of sexual abuse in SBC churches and institutions.

Executive Committee trustees have balked at a provision in the messengers' motion setting up the Task Force that calls for attorney-client privilege to be waived during the investigation, which will conducted by Guidepost Solutions headquartered in New York City.

Trustees voted not to lift attorney-client privilege out of concern about legal liabilities that could arise from removing the privilege during the investigation.

An outspoken minority of trustees are fighting for the messengers' motion to be fully implemented by the Executive Committee, including the waiving of attorney-client privilege. They argue that not doing so would violate Southern Baptist governance which provides for messenger oversight of the convention's entities, as set forth in the Southern Baptist

Constitution.

“Failure [to fully implement the messengers’ motion] will be a severe breach of Baptist polity and will display a complete lack of Christ-like compassion for the victims of sexual abuse in our convention,” states the Mississippi Baptist leaders’ letter.

“[We] pray that each of you will uphold the will of the members of the Southern Baptist Convention as expressed in the motion as passed,” the letter states. “Should the Executive Committee fail to comply with the will of the messengers, we will lead our churches to consider how to reallocate funds away from the Executive Committee while continuing to fund the cooperative mission of proclaiming the gospel to the world and educating men and women for the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.”

The Executive Committee is scheduled for convene at 11:30 a.m. today for a third session of deliberations on how to move forward on the investigation.

For the unabridged Miss. Baptist leaders’ letter and list of signatories, click here.