

Mississippi Baptist will join task force appointed to look into handling of sexual abuse issues by SBC Executive Committee officials



Damon

SARALAND, Ala. (BP and local reports) – Mississippi College graduate John Damon, a member of Broadmoor Church, Madison, and chief executive officer of Canopy Children's Solutions in Jackson, will serve as a member of the task force mandated by messengers to the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Annual meeting to oversee an independent review into the handling of sexual abuse claims by the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville.

Calling formation of the task force his "first priority," new SBC President Ed Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., said the seven members of the task force represent pastors as well as professionals in law, counseling, and abuse advocacy.

"I believe the members of this team are men and women who genuinely pursue God and seek the truth and desire for survivor voices to be heard," said Litton, who was elected June 15 to his first term as SBC president during the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting in Nashville. "I am grateful for their

willingness to serve our Convention in this important role.”

In addition to Damon, task force members appointed by Litton under the messenger motion include:

- Chairman Bruce Frank, lead pastor of Biltmore Baptist Church, Arden, N.C.
- Vice chairman Marshall Blalock, pastor of First Church, Charleston, S.C.
- Liz Evan, judicial law clerk at Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals in Nashville, and member of Hilldale Church, Clarksville, Tenn.
- Heather Evans, director of Evans Counseling Services in Coopersburg, Pa., and member of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Center Valley, Pa.
- Andrew Hébert, lead pastor of Paramount Church, Amarillo, Texas.
- Bucas Sterling III, senior pastor of Kettering Church, Upper Marlboro, Md.

Litton also announced two advisors to the task force with “expertise in handling sexual abuse dynamics:”

- Rachael Denhollander of Louisville, Ky., an attorney, Olympic gold medalist, sexual abuse victim, and sexual abuse survivors’ advocate. She was the first woman to file a police report and speak publicly against USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar, one of the most prolific sexual abusers in U.S. history.

As a result of her activism, more than 250 women came forward as survivors of sexual abuse by Nassar, who is serving a life sentence for his crimes.

- Chris Moles, counselor, author, and ordained minister with

the Christian and Missionary Alliance and senior pastor of The Chapel, Winfield, W.V.

Denhollander and Moles previously served the SBC as members of a sexual abuse advisory group formed in 2018 by former SBC President J.D. Greear while Greear was in office.

Under the terms of the motion setting up the task force, its purpose is to “ensure that the third-party review includes an investigation into any allegations of abuse, mishandling of abuse, mistreatment of victims, a pattern of intimidation of victims or advocates, and resistance to sexual abuse reform initiatives.”

The task force will also have the discretion to begin its own review, or to oversee, an independent review already initiated by the SBC Executive Committee. It is required to make the findings public and present them to messengers to the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim, Ca., with recommendations for action.

The task force motion was approved by messengers amid controversy over allegations made by former SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) President Russell Moore. Moore, who resigned his post in May to join the Christianity Today organization, charged in two letters leaked to news media that calls to address sexual abuse in the SBC had been “stonewall[ed]” by leaders.