

SBC Executive Committee admits 'failures' addressing abuse report



Lyell

NASHVILLE (The Baptist Paper) – The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee in Nashville has come to a resolution with Jennifer Lyell, a former Lifeway Christian Resources employee who said she suffered the loss of her job and reputation after coming forward in 2019 to tell her story of long-term sexual abuse by a Southern Seminary professor while a student at the Southern Baptist school in Louisville, Ky. She also has reported health issues as a result of the fallout from her disclosure.

Rolland Slade, chairman of the Executive Committee and senior pastor of Meridian Church in El Cajon, Calif., read a statement that was approved Feb. 22 by members of the committee meeting in Nashville:

“The SBC Executive Committee acknowledges its failure to adequately listen, protect and care for Jennifer Lyell when she came forward to share her story of abuse by a seminary professor. Baptist Press failed to accurately report the sexual abuse Jennifer Lyell reported to two SBC entities and local Southern Baptist churches.

“The SBC Executive Committee acknowledges its failures to Ms. Lyell, including the unintentional harm created by its failure

to report Ms. Lyell's allegations of nonconsensual sexual abuse [which] were investigated and unequivocally corroborated by the SBC entities with authority over Ms. Lyell and her abuser. The SBC Executive Committee apologizes for all the hurt it has caused, is grateful for Ms. Lyell's perseverance and engagement, and prays for her complete healing from the trauma she has endured."

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SBC Executive Committee statement

No further details of the resolution were released.

In a related matter, Executive Committee members approved increasing the original estimate of \$500,000 in legal fees for the Executive Committee and \$1.6 million in legal fees for the Sexual Abuse Task Force to two million dollars for each entity.

Archie Mason, senior pastor of Central Church in Jonesboro, Ark. and chair of the Executive Committee's committee on convention finances and stewardship development, said projections indicate the four million dollars will be enough to pay the legal fees through the SBC Annual Meeting in June and what might possibly be billed up to the September Executive Committee meeting.

"It's probably going to cost more than that," he said, adding that while the estimate for the final tally of the investigation "is open ended... it's going to have to end in June."

Executive Committee members also heard a brief update on the work of the Sexual Abuse Task Force from SBC President Ed

Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., and chair of the committee on cooperation. Litton is not a member of the task force but appointed the members and chairs the committee formed to serve as a liaison between the task force and the Executive Committee.

“Work is progressing... and there has been cooperation on every level,” he said. “The process is working.”

Gene Besen of the Bradley law firm in Dallas, current interim legal counsel for the Executive Committee, confirmed the work being done by GuidePost Solutions, with which the Executive Committee contracted for the investigation, is “within the confines of what their legal team is investigating.”

Executive Committee members named a seven-member presidential search committee to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Ronnie Floyd last October after the Executive Committee voted to waive attorney-client privilege during the investigation. Executive Committee members named to serve on the search committee are:

- Mollie Duddleston of Arkansas
- Jeremy Morton of Georgia
- Philip Robertson of Louisiana
- Adron Robinson of Illinois
- Rolland Slade of California (*ex officio*)
- David Sons of North Carolina
- Mike Keahbone of Oklahoma