

SBC Executive Committee laments, repents of sex abuse mishandling; rejects actions of former high-ranking officer

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports) – In a special called meeting May 24, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) strongly rebuked a 2006 statement by a former staff member discrediting the worth of communication between the Executive Committee and sexual abuse survivors, and pledged to release a previously undisclosed list of alleged and convicted abusers and establish a survivors' hotline.

During the meeting held over Zoom teleconferencing software, Interim CEO Willie McLaurin also issued a formal apology to abuse survivors on behalf of the entire committee.



McLaurin

“We’ll never know the full extent

of
th
e
pa
in
an
d
th
e
hu
rt
th
at
wa
s
ca
us
ed
fo
r
su
rv
iv
or
s.
Ca
re
fo
r
th
e
vu
ln
er
ab
le
sh

ould
ld
be
ou
r
mo
st
im
po
rt
an
t
co
nc
er
n
wh
en
de
al
in
g
wi
th
se
xu
al
ab
us
e,
”
Mc
La
ur
in
sa
id

,
“a
nd
so
to
da
y,
on
be
ha
lf
of
al
l
So
ut
he
rn
Ba
pt
is
ts
,
I
wa
nt
to
is
su
e
a
fo
rm
al
ap
ol
og

y
an
d
sa
y
th
at
we
ar
e
so
rr
y
to
th
e
su
rv
iv
or
s
fo
r
al
l
th
at
we
'v
e
do
ne
to
ca
us
e
hu

rt
,
pa
in
an
d
fr
us
tr
at
io
n.

“We’re committed today to Gospel reconciliation that will lead toward peace,” he said.

Chairman Rolland Slade, senior pastor of Meridian Church in El Cajon, Ca., lamented the EC’s history of mishandling sexual abuse complaints, acknowledged sex abuse survivors, and thanked all who cooperated with the investigation including the Sex Abuse Task Force and Guidepost Solutions, the Washington, D.C.-based independent contractor that conducted the investigation.

“T
o
th
e
su
rv
iv
Slade
or
co
mm
un
it
y,



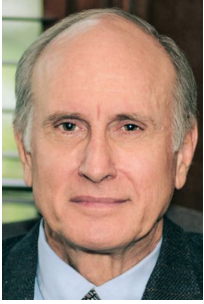
I
ca
n'
t
im
ag
in
e
th
e
pa
in
th
at
yo
u
ar
e
go
in
g
th
ro
ug
h,
an
d
th
e
pa
in
th
at
yo
u
ha
ve

en
du
re
d
fo
r
de
ca
de
s,
”
Sl
ad
e
sa
id
,
“b
ut
I
as
k
yo
u
to
pl
ea
se
be
pa
ti
en
t
wi
th
us
as

we
tr
y
to
gr
as
p
wh
at
's
go
in
g
on
,
wh
at
ha
s
ha
pp
en
ed
.

“This is a new day in the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention and our commitment is to be different and to do different, now that we know we need to do better.”

The actions and comments followed the May 21 release of the investigation into the past 20 years of the EC's handling of sexual abuse complaints, an action ordered by messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting.



Boto

Th
e
EC
by
a
vo
te
of
97
%
wi
th
tw
o
ab
st
en
ti
on
s,
de
cr
ie
d
th
e
20
06
st
at
em
en
t
ma
de
by
D.

Au
gu
st
“A
ug
ie
”

Bo
to
,
wh
o
at
th
e
ti
me
wa
s
EC
vi
ce
pr
es
id
en
t
fo
r
co
nv
en
ti
on
po
li
cy

an
d
ge
ne
ra
l
co
un
se
l.

In question is a Sept. 29, 2006, statement Boto wrote to abuse survivor Christa Brown, revealed on page 58 of the Guidepost Solutions report: “Nevertheless, the adversarial posture which you have assumed is one of several factors leading me to believe that continued discourse between us will not be positive or 100

The EC rejected Boto’s statement and affirmed the worth of communication and transparency. “The SBC Executive Committee rejects this sentiment in its entirety and seeks to publicly repent for its failure to rectify this position and wholeheartedly listen to survivors.

“Today, in the immediate aftermath of the report’s release, the SBC Executive Committee seeks to make clear that it views engaging with survivors as a critical step toward healing our Convention from the scourge of sexual abuse and working to avoid its continued impact on our loved ones, their families, and our network of churches.”

Executive Committee interim counsel Gene Besen pledged to release a previously hidden list of alleged and convicted abusers collected at Boto’s direction by an unnamed, former EC staff member. As of August 2018, there were 585 names on the list, Guidepost Solutions revealed in its report.

“That list was unknown to most of the EC staff and to the

trustees,” Besen said. “In consultation last night with Dr. McLaurin and with Chairman Slade, a decision has been made to make Mr. Boto’s list public. ...We view this as one of the initial steps we can take to begin building transparency in the new EC that Chairman Slade alluded to in his opening remarks.”

The list will be reviewed before release, Besen said, with redactions for names of abuse survivors, potential confidential witnesses, and uncorroborated allegations of abuse.

The EC will also study the possibility of revoking certain retirement benefits currently received by Boto and possibly others, Besen announced. Talk of revoking such benefits spurred discussion among EC members, but no motion was made on the issue.

“Dr. McLaurin and I have discussed and we are prepared to review whether or not the EC has the ability to revoke Mr. Boto’s retirement benefits,” Besen said. “We intend to review that and we intend to announce further actions in that regard on what our decisions and conclusions have been.”

The EC is working with Guidepost Solutions to establish a survivors’ hotline to care for those who allege incidents of abuse. “The SBC Executive Committee is committed to ensuring each and every individual impacted by sexual abuse within the SBC has a place to process their story, report their abuse, and have access to care and caring resources,” McLaurin said.

In its lengthy report compiled after the months-long investigation and numerous interviews, Guidepost Solutions reported a pattern of resistance to addressing abuse claims from 2000-2021.

The EC will continue to process the report and take additional actions in response, likely in the coming weeks, Slade said.

The EC's full adopted statement reads as follows:

As Southern Baptists review Guidepost's report and the recommendations of the Sexual Abuse Task Force, the SBC Executive Committee would like to address statements it has previously made, including, but not limited to, the September 29, 2006 statement by then-SBC Executive Committee vice president and general counsel, D. August Boto, in which he concludes that a "continued discourse between us [the Executive Committee and Survivor advocates] will not be positive or fruitful."

The SBC Executive Committee rejects this sentiment in its entirety and seeks to publicly repent for its failure to rectify this position and wholeheartedly listen to survivors. Today, in the immediate aftermath of the report's release, the SBC Executive Committee seeks to make clear that it views engaging with survivors as a critical step toward healing our Convention from the scourge of sexual abuse and working to avoid its continued impact on our loved ones, their families, and our network of churches.