

# **SBC Executive Committee, Sexual Abuse Task Force remain at loggerheads over investigation; SBC president 'grieved'**

NASHVILLE (BP and local reports)—A special called meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee Sept. 28 failed to resolve disagreements between the Committee and the Convention's newly-appointed Sexual Abuse Task Force on how to proceed with an independent investigation into allegations that the Executive Committee administration has mishandled matters surrounding sexual abuse in SBC churches and institutions.



Litton

The end result of the five-hour, virtual meeting was to extend discussions another seven days in order to pursue a potential agreement using what is known as the Michigan model.

SBC President Ed Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., who appointed the Task Force under the direction of messengers to the 2021 SBC annual meeting in June, said, "After failing to reach an agreement during the previous seven-day extension, I am grieved the Executive Committee determined yet more time is needed before honoring the clear will of the messengers with regard to attorney-

client privilege.”

Messengers ordered that attorney-client privileges be waived during the investigation, but Executive Committee members have balked.



Frank

“As Task Force Chairman Bruce Frank made clear today, there is no question about whether the investigation will take place,” Litton said. “The only question that remains is whether the Executive Committee will pledge its full support and cooperation to this process by adhering to the messengers’ direction.”

Litton said he remained prayerful that the Executive Committee “will ultimately choose to take the necessary step of waiving attorney-client privilege and demonstrate that its commitment to full cooperation is more than mere words.”

In a statement from an Executive Committee spokesperson, Southern Baptists were asked to pray “that seven days from now we will finally have a Task Force and Executive Committee Board of Trustees united not only in its commitment to address concerns related to sexual abuse [through the independent review], but also confident in a process that complies with the will of the messengers and is attentive to all other fiduciary and legal considerations.

“We pray Southern Baptists will see this grueling and deliberative process as necessary, and in accordance with the Convention’s bylaws, as the Board of Trustees, Task Force, and Executive Committee leadership all work diligently,

prayerfully, and as expeditiously as possible to do the right thing in the right way. We are all in this together.”

Under the Michigan model, the independent investigative team – in this case, Guidepost Solutions headquartered in New York City – can review all the evidence while only reporting on non-privileged information.



Wood

The Task Force would contract not only with Guidepost, but also with a law firm that would determine what is privileged information, a sticking point in current negotiations.

“The law firm would provide the umbrella of privilege, Guidepost would conduct the investigation working with the law firm on privilege issues, and Guidepost would have access to all information,” said Guidepost CEO Julie Myers Wood. “Guidepost could not report on privileged information in its public report.”



Slade

Frank said although the Michigan model doesn’t check every box on the Task Force’s wish list, it could potentially lead to what messengers truly hope for. “I think we can stand up [and say to SBC messengers], while we didn’t get attorney-client

privilege waived, you can believe this report. This report was thorough. It can be a very good report with the Michigan model.”

At the beginning of the Sept. 28 meeting, Executive Committee Chairman Rolland Slade, pastor of Meridian Church in El Cajon, Ca., expressed disappointment at the fruitless result of eight hours of meetings the day before, but said he felt both sides were much closer to an agreement and “a fair and factual investigation.”

“It’s about the people, the ones who have been hurt. I’m hoping that’s where our hearts will continue to stay,” he said. “I think we’re closer to something [workable].”