



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

2022

Public Policy Agenda

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The second session of the 117th Congress is now underway, and it begins as the nation is still grappling with a global pandemic, supply chain issues, and economic uncertainty. This is a midterm election year, meaning that the window for legislative activity is shorter than usual, and—if history is any indication—the Congressional landscape will likely change in November.

The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) has been through a season of transition over the past year, but we have continued carrying out our ministry directive to serve the public policy interests of Southern Baptists, and we will always represent Southern Baptists before Congress, the courts, and the administration. In 2021, the Southern Baptist Convention was the first denomination to pass a resolution rightly calling what's happening to the Uyghur

people in China a genocide. Through advocacy efforts from the ERLC and like-minded partners, Congress passed and President Biden signed into law an important bill titled the “*Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act*.” Our advocacy against the genocide perpetrated against the Uyghur people will continue this year as we remain a voice for persecuted people. Additionally, in 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case titled *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. It is the most important pro-life case in a generation and could overturn the disastrous precedents set in prior cases like *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. We will work toward a day when abortion is unthinkable and unnecessary.

In some ways, our ERLC public policy agenda will be the same as that of all Americans of goodwill—an end to the COVID-19 disease that now enters year three of plaguing the world. In other ways, we anticipate multiple issues will emerge unique to the mission of the ERLC. As always, we will work with any and all of those elected by the people, or appointed to serve in our government by those who were so elected, on issues where we may share common concern. On some of those issues—such as criminal justice reform, the regulation of payday lenders, and providing a just solution to the plight of children brought to this country by their parents and now in legal limbo—there may well prove to be broad bipartisan consensus already. On other issues—such as protecting pre-born children and their mothers, strengthening protections for religious freedom and conscience, and advocacy for religious minorities in peril around the world—there will probably be much less consensus in a divided and increasingly partisan America. Nevertheless, whether issues are currently popular or unpopular, we have the opportunity to bear witness, to seek to persuade, and to build the consensus needed to make change.

In addition to our work with the executive and legislative branches of the federal government, the ERLC will continue our advocacy before the judicial branch on matters consistent with our mission and will continue to work in partnership with state conventions and state advocacy groups on issues of missional priority that are of national importance.

The following agenda is not an exhaustive blueprint, but a sketch of the core public policy priorities for the next year through the cooperation of congregations throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.

Religious Liberty

“God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church



should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.”

In this way, the *Baptist Faith and Message* summarizes the biblical teaching on religious liberty and freedom of conscience, a distinctive passed down to us from our Baptist forefathers and foremothers, some of whom were imprisoned or executed as they stood for these truths. Moreover, our Baptist ancestors in the United States were instrumental in the crafting and adoption of the First Amendment to our Constitution, which guarantees free exercise of religion, for all, and forbids the establishment of a state-driven religion. The ERLC will continue this legacy in our moral education but also in our advocacy: a legacy of religious freedom for all people, not just for those who share our beliefs. We expect some of the following to be issues of particular concern in 2022.

- **Defend Religious Freedom during the COVID-19 Pandemic:** The ongoing pandemic has raised a number of religious freedom issues around our country. Public health orders have created thousands of potential areas of conflict, as local officials in communities individually respond to local conditions. The ERLC will continue to advocate that the government treat churches the same as similar activities, businesses, and spaces, while recognizing that First Amendment protections are not shed by churches during a health emergency. At the same time, we recognized that God has given the state the authority to manage activities, businesses, and spaces during a national health crisis. To this end, the ERLC has produced a number of resources to equip churches as they work to understand the public health orders issued in their community and as they engage with local officials to advocate for their religious liberty rights. Additionally, as the Biden administration has issued sweeping mandates regarding the vaccines, we affirm the state must not use public health emergencies to overstep and exert authority that the Constitution has not entrusted it with.
- **Oppose *The Equality Act*:** There are multiple pieces of legislation introduced in recent years which aim to, at the most extreme, codify the demands of the sexual revolution and radically reshape religious freedom in the United States. In February 2021, the House passed *The Equality Act*—a bill that would amend the *1964 Civil Rights Act* to add sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes under federal civil rights law. The bill would curtail religious freedom protections, hinder the work of healthcare professionals and faith-based hospitals, undermine civil rights protections for women and girls, and ultimately steamroll the consciences of millions of Americans. The ERLC believes that this bill represents the



most significant threat to religious liberty ever considered in the United States Congress. We will continue to lead efforts to oppose the *Equality Act* and any similar legislation introduced this Congress. As we do so, we will advocate for a public square solution that protects and upholds the dignity of all people and their rights, while ensuring that religiously motivated individuals and institutions are free to live and act according to their deeply held convictions.

- **Oppose the *Do No Harm Act*:** The ERLC will oppose the so-called *Do No Harm Act*, which would essentially hollow out the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)*, gutting its most central purpose. The bill, if passed into law, would weaken religious freedom protections for millions of Americans. The ERLC opposes the *Do No Harm Act* because it would do significant harm to the landscape of legal protections foundational to America’s first freedom.
- **Support the *Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act*:** Across the country, child welfare and child protection systems are overcrowded and under significant strain. Unfortunately, it is in this context that some states and cities are working to close those child welfare providers who seek to operate in a manner consistent with their religious convictions. This leads to fewer families available for foster care and adoption. The *Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act* would prohibit government discrimination against child welfare agencies on the basis of their beliefs, and ultimately protect children in the foster system and children waiting for adoption by ensuring that a wide range of child welfare providers are available to serve them.
- **Protect Faith-Based Child Care and Universal Pre-K Entities in *Build Back Better*:** The reconciliation package includes expanded access to pre-K and child care programs, but the bill text significantly restricts the participation of faith-based centers and schools. The way the block grant program has traditionally operated is by providing child care certificates to eligible parents who are able to use the certificate for the provider of their choice. The grant program also protects religious identity, religious teaching, religious hiring, and religious admissions standards of faith-based child care providers that receive these federally funded certificates. Under the reconciliation program, the child care funding isn’t added to the grant program, but runs parallel to the program and includes new restrictions that would subject the certificates to the Head Start program’s nondiscrimination requirements. Sex discrimination would be prohibited, meaning that some child care facilities that operate on sex-segregated facilities would be prohibited from participation. In addition, religious criteria for hiring and admissions would be prohibited. The universal pre-K program would be subjected to the same religion restricting requirements as the child care funding but goes one step further. The program would use grants to fund the program, not issue certificates to parents, and would prohibit any religious teaching or activities in the federally supported pre-K programs.
- **Oppose Rescission of HHS Conscience Protection Waivers:** In November 2021, HHS, through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and Office for Civil Rights (OCR),



announced the rescission of waivers issued by the Trump administration that protect the religious freedom and consciences of millions of Americans. Notably, HHS is rescinding waivers given to South Carolina, Texas, and Michigan, including child welfare agencies in those states. In 2019 under the Trump administration, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced a religious liberty waiver for South Carolina’s faith-based organizations following a request from South Carolina Gov. McMaster. This waiver, based on the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)*, granted protections for faith-based organizations in South Carolina and allowed them to continue receiving federal funding without compromising their religious principles and convictions. The ERLC has communicated our concerns about these moves to the Administration and we will continue advocating on behalf of the faith community on this important matter.

- **Oppose the Transgender Mandate:** In 2021, a federal court in Texas ruled that it is unlawful to force healthcare professionals to violate their consciences for gender transition procedures. In 2016, as a part of the implementation of Section 1557 of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)*, the Obama administration’s Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) promulgated a rule requiring medical providers to perform and insure abortions and gender-transition procedures or face penalties. Section 1557 of the ACA is the nondiscrimination provision of the ACA, and the scope was broadened by redefining “sex” to include sexual orientation and gender identity. However, the Biden administration appealed the court’s ruling, once again sending a group of Catholic nuns who run health clinics to care for the elderly and the poor back to court. On December 15, 2021, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals heard [oral arguments](#) in this case titled *Sisters of Mercy v. Becerra*. The ERLC will work to oppose this harmful mandate that violates the consciences and religious liberty of these healthcare providers.
- **Respond to Decision in *Ramirez v. Collier*:** In September 2021, just hours before John Ramirez was to be executed for a murder in Corpus Christi, Texas, the Supreme Court granted a stay of the execution. Ramirez sued Texas prison officials for refusing to permit Dana Moore, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, to minister to him during his execution. Ramirez requested that Moore be allowed to physically touch him and audibly pray in the execution chamber. The Supreme Court justices granted a stay of execution, fast-tracked his appeal, and heard [oral arguments](#) in November. The ERLC submitted an amicus brief in this important case, and we are hopeful that the Court will rightly decide this case and allow inmates to have spiritual counsel and comfort in their final hours.
- **Respond to Decision in *Carson v. Makin*:** In December 2020, the Supreme Court heard a key religious liberty case entitled *Carson v. Makin*, which is a follow up from *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia v. Comer* and *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, which both dealt with the question of whether states can exclude organizations and schools from receiving



public benefits simply because they are religious. Each case was decided favorably for religious liberty. The *Carson* case arises out of the unique way that Maine provides free education. In Maine, there are rural areas where students don't have easy access to a public school. Given that limitation, some of the school districts allow parents to choose a private school in the area to teach their children, however Maine did not allow families to send their children to religiously affiliated private schools. The brief the ERLC joined on the merits argues that Maine's public education system, especially in light of how Maine defended its system in the courts, does not merely exclude religious schools—it discriminates against them. The brief goes on to argue that where a state discriminates against religion, courts should immediately strike down the law rather than applying any kind of balancing test with state interests.

- **Protect Religious Freedom for Military Chaplains and Medical Professionals:** As the country continues to grapple with the ever-evolving ideologies of our time, conflicts develop for those who hold to God's design for human sexuality. The ERLC will continue to advocate for the religious freedom of chaplains and medical professionals who in good conscience cannot adapt their professional lives to the ongoing demands of the sexual revolution.
- **Support a Two-year Universal Charitable Deduction to Encourage Giving to Charities:** A Universal Charitable Deduction (UCD) would incentivize all taxpayers to give to nonprofits and charities, including churches. This action would help mitigate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our government should welcome the generosity of all citizens—at all levels of income—who desire to help their neighbors through religious associations, educational institutions, and any organization that relieves poverty. The *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017* doubled the standard deduction, which means that most Americans no longer itemize their deductions. Under the federal tax code, people can only claim a deduction for charitable contributions if they itemize their deductions. Since the number of people who itemize deductions has decreased, many nonprofits are concerned there would be a drop in donations, because of the lack of incentive to give. The Charitable Deduction is the only deduction for which the taxpayer receives no other material benefit (compared with the mortgage interest deduction or tuition deduction). The ERLC will continue to advocate for this important provision.

Sanctity of Human Life

“The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.”

In this way, the Baptist Faith and Message summarizes the biblical revelation that every person bears the image of God, and thus worthy of protection and dignity, regardless of age, level of ability, or stage of development.



The ERLC will continue our advocacy for all human life, including that of the preborn. While the abortion rate is at the lowest it's been since it was legalized in 1973, the number still remains excruciatingly high. These are precious human lives denied both personhood and protection by an abortion culture.

This year, we continue our witness on behalf of the most vulnerable among us, which begins with the March for Life. In addition to our advocacy work for life in Washington, D.C., the ERLC, through our Psalm 139 Project, will be placing ultrasound machines across the country, hosting Road to ROE50 events, and collaborating with other life-focused partners through Stand for Life. In our advocacy with the federal government, state legislatures, and the courts, we will seek both to protect previous gains in these areas and to persuade others to consider the dignity of human lives too often deemed invisible. Even in those pieces of legislation that do not seem likely to pass in a given year, we have the opportunity to build support for these measures for the years to come. The following are some aspects of our pro-life legislative priorities:

- **Respond to the Decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*:** In 2021, the Supreme Court heard [oral arguments](#) in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the most consequential abortion case in a generation. This summer the Supreme Court will issue its decision in that case, potentially overturning the disastrous decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and ultimately sending the issue of abortion back to the states. The ERLC joined an amicus brief in this case, asking the court to overturn those harmful precedents, and will work to ensure that abortion is unthinkable and unnecessary. We will work to ensure that states are equipped to respond if and when abortion is sent back to the states.
- **Protect Pro-life Riders in the Congressional Appropriations Process:** Each year, as we carefully analyze Congress's appropriations bills, we work to ensure that historic pro-life riders are maintained and included. Pro-life amendments have been attached to appropriations bills as "riders" for years. For over 40 years, the Hyde Amendment has protected American consciences and been recognized by each Congress as they passed it into law through the appropriations process. Last year, we saw the most serious threat yet to the Hyde Amendment, as the House abandoned its inclusion in the appropriations, for the first time since it was enacted. An end to the Hyde Amendment is a major priority of groups that oppose our pro-life views. We will work to preserve the Hyde Amendment not only because it prevents government-funded violence against preborn children but also because it prevents the government from coercing citizens to act against their consciences in the taxpayer incentivization of something we believe to be unjust. Other pro-life amendments include the Weldon Amendment, protecting the consciences of health care workers from discrimination on the basis of their refusal to provide, pay for, or refer women for abortion. The Siljander Amendment prohibits U.S. funds



from being used to lobby for or against abortion. We will seek to ensure that we don't sacrifice other riders such as the Dornan Amendment, the Kemp-Kasten Amendment, the Dickey-Wicker Amendment, and the Helms Amendment, at the expense of saving the Hyde Amendment. All of these pro-life riders are important and must be protected.

- **Prevent Proliferation of Chemical Abortions:** Chemical abortion (sometimes referred to as a medication abortion or pharmaceutical abortion) is a method that uses an abortifacient to stimulate uterine contractions and end the pregnancy in a process similar to miscarriage. Between 2017 and 2018, chemical abortions increased by 9%. As surgical abortion procedures decline, chemical abortions rose, making up 41% of the total in 2018. The ERLC has asked the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to categorize the abortion pill mifepristone, sold under the brand name Mifeprex, as an “imminent hazard to the public health.” However, the FDA in 2021 moved to increase access by permanently allowing these abortion pills to be delivered by mail. As it seems likely that the Supreme Court will rule to send the question of abortion rights to the states, efforts to restrict chemical abortions that threaten human life and dignity will become increasingly in the spotlight.
- **Oppose the Women’s Health Protection Act:** The *Women’s Health Protection Act of 2021* removes all restrictions and limits on abortion and allows for abortion up to the point of birth. Additionally, this bill removes all pro-life protections at the federal and state levels and eliminates a state’s ability to legislate on abortion. This bill also fails to protect the consciences of American taxpayers by utilizing taxpayer dollars to pay for abortions. This bill was passed by the House of Representatives, but did not receive a vote in the Senate. The *Women’s Health Protection Act* is the most pro-abortion bill to have passed the House. The ERLC and the pro-life community strongly opposed this bill, and will continue to do so in the upcoming year.
- **Raise Pro-Life Concerns in the *Build Back Better Act*:** Last year the House of Representatives passed President Biden’s *Build Back Better Act* through a legislative tool known as “reconciliation.” This bill excludes the lifesaving Hyde Amendment, and in multiple instances directs funding to abortion providers. The ERLC will continue to raise these concerns as the Senate considers this bill.
- **Support the *No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act*:** Since the enactment of the Hyde Amendment in 1977, and signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, the Congress has passed the amendment as a temporary rider which expires each year. The *No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act* would codify the Hyde Amendment into law, by prohibiting federal funds from being expended for abortion or health coverage that includes coverage for elective abortion. This piece of legislation has been introduced in the 117th Congress but has not yet received a vote.



- **Support the *Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act*:** Federal law does not adequately protect a born child who survives a failed abortion. At that moment, such children deserve all the medical care possible. The *Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act* would amend the federal criminal code to require any health care practitioner present when a child is born alive following an abortion or attempted abortion to, first, exercise the same degree of care as reasonably provided to any other child born alive at the same gestational age, and, second, ensure the child is immediately admitted to a hospital. The *Born Alive* bill has been introduced in the 117th Congress but has not yet received a vote in either chamber.
- **Support the *Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act*:** Currently, the U.S. is one of only seven nations in the world that allows elective abortions after 20 weeks post-fertilization. The *Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act* would prohibit the performing (or attempted performance) of abortions on babies at 20 weeks or greater gestation, except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother. In the 115th Congress, the bill passed the House of Representatives. However, this bill did not pass in the 116th Congress and has not yet received a vote in the 117th Congress. We will continue to build support for this legislation this Congress.
- **Support the *Conscience Protection Act*:** No healthcare worker should have to compromise their deeply held beliefs in order to administer care. Healthcare workers should not be forced to participate in medical procedures that conflict with their religiously informed consciences. The *Conscience Protection Act* provides conscience protections for Americans with religious or moral objections to health insurance that covers contraception methods. We believe rules such as these are critical to curb conscience abuses across the country. The ERLC will continue to advocate for the protection of consciences in legislation, and will oppose any policies that attempt to rescind similar protections in federal law.
- **Oppose Legalization of Surrogacy:** Surrogacy is the practice by which a woman (called a surrogate mother) becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby in order to give it to someone who cannot (or will not) bear children of their own. A surrogate mother is a woman who carries and gives birth to the child of another woman, by way of a pre-arranged legal contract. There are a number of ethical issues, including the exploitation of women (e.g., “womb-renting”), the selling of children, the violation of the marital covenant, and the use of embryo-destructive reproductive technology. While there aren’t currently any federal surrogacy laws, it is legal, or not expressly prohibited, in almost every state. The ERLC will monitor state and federal legislation to stop the spread and legalization of surrogacy.
- **Oppose Physician-Assisted Suicide:** Physician-assisted suicide is currently legal in nine states, and the District of Columbia, as well as Montana by court decision. This is a practice in clear conflict with ethical principles from both the Hippocratic tradition and a biblical worldview. Physician-assisted suicide is not healthcare. Pain (physical, medical) and suffering (emotional,



psychological, spiritual) are each treatable given proper diagnosis and care (Matt. 25:35; Luke 4:18-21; James 1:27; 2:8). Treatable pain and care ought not be cause for death. Hospice and palliative care options provide compassionate and ethical treatment that recognize human dignity. The effort now on Capitol Hill for the ERLC is largely one of education, even among members and staff who we otherwise would expect to already share our convictions about assisted suicide.

Family and Marriage

“God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

“Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God’s unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

“The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God’s image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

“Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God’s pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle examples and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.”

In this way, the *Baptist Faith and Message* affirms the biblical teaching of marriage and family as creation ordinances and blessings from God, foundational to human flourishing. We will continue to advocate for policies that maintain and protect these essential aspects of life together. Some aspects of this advocacy of particular interest in 2022 include the following:

- **Support Adoption and Foster Care Policies:** The ERLC’s defense of vulnerable children is woven through a wide variety of priorities, from religious liberty concerns involved in adoption to the effect the opioid crisis has on foster care as parents struggle with addiction. In addition to the *Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act* discussed above, we are exploring several policies aimed at promoting and supporting adoption and foster care in the United States.
- **Support the Adoptee Citizenship Act:** Prior to the *Child Citizenship Act of 2000*, the administrative steps required of families adopting internationally were unnecessarily burdensome.



The process included applying for and moving through a lengthy naturalization process for their children, in addition to the lengthy and costly adoption process. The *Child Citizenship Act of 2000* granted automatic citizenship to all foreign-born children brought to the United States, who had at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen. Unfortunately, that act only applied to adoptees under the age of 18 when the bill was enacted, leaving an entire population of adopted children without full U.S. citizenship. The *Adoptee Citizenship Act* closes the loophole to provide immediate citizenship to these children already adopted by U.S. citizens yet left out of the previous bill.

- **Ensure Intercountry Adoption Remains a Viable Option:** In 2019, only 2,971 children were welcomed into families through intercountry adoption. The reasons for this decline vary, from certain countries completely halting their intercountry programs to other countries placing more children in homes domestically. There's also been a decline in stateside adoption agencies facilitating intercountry adoption, narrowing the options for prospective parents. Many countries and cultures are becoming more open to domestic foster care and adoption. That is certainly good news, and ought to be encouraged. However, there are still millions of orphans worldwide who long to be raised in a family where they are known and loved instead of remaining a number in an impersonal institution. Intercountry adoption must remain a viable option for welcoming those children into homes, and we must do all we can to facilitate those adoptions. In some countries, especially developing nations, the only chance a child might have at growing up in a safe, loving, permanent home is intercountry. The ERLC is working with like-minded partners and the U.S. Department of State to ensure that intercountry adoption remains a viable option for families and vulnerable children around the world.
- **Combat Hunger During COVID-19 Pandemic:** The COVID-19 crisis has impacted food supply chains, driving up the price of food, which has a disparate impact for lower-income families. Many families found themselves needing to access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). While Congress did expand and increase unemployment insurance and benefits, many families are still unable to feed their children. Malnutrition weakens peoples' immune systems, and children who are malnourished face long-term health and cognitive consequences. The ERLC has prioritized this issue by advocating for flexibility within the SNAP program, to ensure that individuals' needs are met, and that all Americans have access to food security.
- **Strengthen Low-Income Families:** If the family is the most foundational unit of society, it is crucial that all aspects of federal policy provide a platform for families to thrive and flourish. The ERLC has been working on policies to aid low-income families, and create opportunities for upward mobility.
- **Respond to the Opioid Crisis:** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, opioids were involved in 49,860 deaths in 2019, accounting for over 70% of all drug overdose deaths



that year. In 2020, drug overdose deaths in the United States rose by a staggering 31%. The drivers for this epidemic are complex but the effects are simply tragic. Thankfully, the United States government took action and Congress passed the largest bill in American history to address a single drug crisis – *The SUPPORT for Patients and Community Act (H.R. 6)*. This bill was then signed into law by President Trump marking a significant step forward in response to the opioid crisis. The legislation approved \$6 billion in funding, curbed drug shipments, lifted treatment restrictions, expanded recovery centers, sped up new painkiller research, and made regulatory changes to Medicare and Medicaid. We will continue to engage with Congressional leadership and the Department of Health and Human Services on implementation of the *SUPPORT Act* and a range of efforts including poverty and welfare programs and training for the faith community. Along the bill’s path to passage, the ERLC engaged with members of Congress and the White House, as well as Sheriffs’ associations, medical professionals, and the faith community.

- **Revive Obscenity Prosecution:** The Obama administration’s Department of Justice terminated the Obscenity Prosecution Task Force (OPTF). Though the Department continued to prosecute cases involving children (which is essential), they ignored virtually all other violations of existing federal law which makes production and distribution of hardcore pornography illegal. The ERLC will advocate for the Department of Justice under the Biden administration to seriously and aggressively confront the exploitation of women, teens, and girls and boys by the pornography industry and for laws to be passed by Congress seeking the same protections.

Justice

“All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.”

In this way, the *Baptist Faith and Message* echoes the biblical mandate to seek justice and righteousness, especially for those who are vulnerable. God revealed in the words of the prophet Micah: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and



to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8) In our advocacy for fair and impartial judgment, and equitable treatment of the unjustly oppressed and marginalized, we bear witness to a God who is ultimately the just Judge, and a gospel that saves all who believe without partiality. This commitment to biblical justice is seen in some of the following priorities for this Congress:

- **Support a Permanent Solution for Dreamers:** After multiple attempts to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, followed by more than a year of litigation and a Supreme Court decision, those young immigrants who were brought to the United States by their parents remain in an unstable situation. These immigrants broke no law, and yet they remain without permanent legal status. Now young adults, these Dreamers—many of whom have families of their own with children who are U.S. citizens—are workers, students, and positive contributors to their communities. We will continue to work closely with Congress and the Biden administration to deliver a permanent legislative solution for Dreamers.
- **Support Further Criminal Justice Reform:** Following on the heels of the historic First Step Act, which was passed at the end of 2018, the ERLC will continue to advocate for reforms that focus on transformation and rehabilitation. Two such bills are the *Recognizing Education, Employment, New Skills, and Treatment to Enable Reintegration Act (RE-ENTER Act)* and the *Eliminating a Quantifiably Unjust Application of the Law Act (EQUAL Act)*. The *RE-ENTER Act* allows eligible individuals with federal convictions to apply for a certificate of rehabilitation from a district court, attesting to a law-abiding future and a commitment to successful reintegration into society. Several states already issue such certificates, which have been proven successful in aiding recipients with employment and housing—two important factors necessary for successful reintegration. The *EQUAL Act* would remedy the disparity in federal sentencing for crack and powder cocaine related crimes. More than 40 states have already corrected this unjust, inconsistent practice. Both of these bills have broad bipartisan support, and the ERLC will continue to advocate for their swift passage.
- **Support Payday Lending Regulations:** In November 2019, a bill entitled the *Veterans and Consumers Fair Credit Act* was introduced in both the House and the Senate. The bill would extend the payday and car title 36% interest rate cap protections currently established under the *Military Lending Act* to all consumers, including veterans and their families. All Americans deserve such protection. In ongoing cooperation with the Faith for Just Lending Coalition, the ERLC was instrumental in advancing the repeal of the harmful “True Lender” rule last year and will continue to work for the regulation of an industry that has resulted in a devastatingly endless cycle of debt and despair for millions of Americans.
- **Rebuild the Refugee Resettlement Program:** Over the last five years, the U.S. refugee resettlement program has been curtailed dramatically, along with the network of nonprofits and



community service organizations that support refugee resettlement, ultimately leading to the resettlement of a historic low number of refugees in fiscal year 2021. This means the United States has not carried its share of the burden at a time of historic levels of refugees and internally displaced people worldwide. These policy changes to the refugee resettlement program have had devastating effects for those who have been persecuted for their faith, particularly our brothers and sisters in Christ. President Biden has set an ambitious goal of resettling 125,000 refugees in fiscal year 2022. The ERLC is working to ensure that resettlement agencies and churches working with these refugees as well as Afghans who were granted humanitarian parolee are able to fully rebuild and welcome these vulnerable people well. We will continue to advocate for fully restoring the refugee resettlement program and America’s legacy as a beacon of hope to those fleeing persecution.

- **Advocate for Anti-Human Trafficking Laws:** In April of 2018, the *Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act* was passed into law. The law grants states and victims the power to sue websites that support and facilitate human trafficking. In December 2018, *The Trafficking Victims Protection Act* was reauthorized as the *Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act*, and appropriated \$430 million over four years for a comprehensive, whole-of-government effort to combat human trafficking at home and abroad. The ERLC will continue to advocate for anti-human trafficking legislation in Congress—particularly legislation aimed at supporting trafficking victims.
- **Support the *Central American Women and Children Protection Act*:** Women and children in Central America face high levels of violence, including femicide. Northern Triangle countries have some of the highest homicide rates in the world, with many crimes against women going unreported due to government corruption and justice system failures. This lack of protection and threat of violence has led many vulnerable women and children to make the dangerous journey to the United States to seek asylum protections. Gender-based violence is one of the driving forces of migration, and many female migrants are subjected to rape or sexual abuse on their journey through Mexico. By deterring violence and making communities safer through resourcing local partners, the *Central American Women and Children Protection Act* helps address the root causes of migration that force women and children to flee. The ERLC will continue to advocate for this bipartisan legislation and look for other opportunities to support vulnerable migrants and address the root causes of migration.

International Engagement

“It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.



“The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.”

In this way, *the Baptist Faith and Message* sets forth a biblical vision of peace and flourishing for all the peoples of the world. Just as the ERLC works for the good and flourishing of our brothers, sisters, and neighbors in the United States, we likewise advocate for these things in the international arena. Our international work is focused on protecting the most vulnerable, such as the preborn, persecuted Christians and religious minorities, and vulnerable children.

- **Advocate for a strong Office of International Religious Freedom:** The Office of International Religious Freedom at the Department of State is one of the most effective government institutions for protecting religious minorities, including persecuted Christians. The ERLC advocated for the appointment of a strong, capable, and experienced Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and for continuity of leadership at the Office until a new Ambassador-at-Large is appointed. We were grateful that the Senate confirmed Rashad Hussain, and we look forward to working with him to advance religious freedom around the globe. We will also continue to advocate for international religious freedom to remain a top U.S. foreign policy priority.
- **Support the Implementation of the *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act*:** The CCP systematically subjects Uyghurs to forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and throughout China. The Uyghur people are forced to produce goods that are then sold around the world, including in the United States, and the CCP is financially profiting from this reprehensible practice. Currently, any brand sourcing apparel, textiles, yarn or cotton from XUAR is almost certainly profiting from forced Uyghur labor. This despicable practice is a clear violation of human rights, and the United States must hold China accountable for these atrocities. The *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act* prohibits goods made with forced labor in the XUAR or by entities using Uyghur labor forcibly transferred from the XUAR from entering the U.S. market. This legislation also instructs the U.S. government to impose sanctions against any foreign person who knowingly engages in the forced labor of Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups in the XUAR. At the end of 2021, this bill passed Congress with huge bipartisan support, and was signed into law by President Biden. The ERLC supported this important bill, and will work to ensure it’s properly implemented.
- **Continue the China International Religious Freedom Initiative:** Over the past several years, the Chinese government has severely escalated its persecution of religious minorities, including Christians, by destroying religious symbols on houses of worship, burning Bibles, confiscating religious materials, closing houses of worship, and detaining individuals holding divergent views. Since April 2017, China has systematically detained more than one million



Uyghur Muslims and placed them into “re-education camps.” In these internment camps, Uyghurs are prevented from engaging in their religious practices and forcibly “re-educated” to the Communist Party’s ideological standard of “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” They are also subjected to physiological and oftentimes physical persecution, and their cultural heritage and practices are being erased. The Chinese people are facing threats to manifesting their religious beliefs in public, private, and in the community. The ERLC has grave concerns about the trajectory of China’s approach to Christians and other religious minorities and is committed to working with other nongovernmental organizations to direct both U.S. and international pressure towards alleviating their persecution. In 2021, the Southern Baptist Convention was the first denomination to pass a resolution rightly calling what’s happening to the Uyghur people a genocide. The ERLC has hosted events to highlight these atrocities. The ERLC has also advocated for the genocide determination and will continue to be a voice for the persecuted in China.

- **Engage in International Pro-Life Work:** For decades, the abortion industry has been working to create an “international right to abortion” to be codified by international organizations such as the United Nations. The ERLC will continue to work against this lobby at the United Nations, ensuring that international law is not expanded to include such a right. In addition, the ERLC is exploring opportunities to support countries seeking to exercise their right to protect life within their borders.
- **Advocate for the Elimination of Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws:** The tragic case of Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi and many others in the past years have illuminated the severe and unjust nature of blasphemy and apostasy laws. Dozens of countries still enforce these laws—often through the death penalty—prohibiting one from converting to another religion or speaking or acting in any way that is deemed offensive to the god of their particular religion. This is even enforced, such as in Pakistan, against adherents of other faiths. We are committed to working to repeal these laws and ensure that all peoples have the right to worship freely without fear of persecution or penalization.
- **Combat Global Anti-Semitism:** Numerous researchers and advocacy groups have demonstrated the reality of an alarming rise of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe and the United States. Anti-Semitic speech has also increased around the world, particularly in the Middle East. The so-called “Alt-Right” movement in the United States has contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism in America, while a variety of sometimes seemingly disparate ideological groups have driven the same around the world. Through collaborative action with like minded organizations, we will work against such action at the United Nations, and the ERLC will continue its work defending victims of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe and anti-Semitic speech and action wherever they happen.

