



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS  
LIBERTY COMMISSION  
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

September 14, 2023

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
728 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Ranking Member  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
425 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Chairman  
House Armed Services Committee  
2469 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee  
2264 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith and members of the United States House and Senate Armed Services Committees:

I am writing to you today as the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Our organization represents the public policy interests of over 50,000 churches and congregations and nearly 14 million members through their membership in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

As Congress works toward a final package on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I write to convey the priorities of Southern Baptists in these negotiations.

**1. Southern Baptists remain opposed to any government funding of abortion.** As stated in our 2022 [Resolution](#), Southern Baptists have recognized the sanctity of life in the womb and have repeatedly reaffirmed our strong commitment to protecting life and our support for abortion-vulnerable women in more than 20 resolutions over the past 40 years. We believe that all people are made in the image of God and endowed with immeasurable worth, explicitly affirming “the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death” in [Article XV](#) of [The Baptist Faith & Message](#), our denomination’s statement of faith. As a result, we strongly object to tax dollars being used for this great moral wrong, the taking of a preborn child’s life.

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* sent the issue of abortion back to the states, allowing many to enact pro-life laws restricting abortion. Federally funded travel across state lines for the purpose of obtaining an abortion not only subverts the



decision of these states to restrict abortion access, but uses taxpayer dollars to explicitly fund the facilitation of abortion, flouting federal law and the longstanding desires of the American people.

In addition to the dubious legality of this practice, Southern Baptists believe there are two key ethical concerns in the usage of federal funds for abortion. First, any government funding of abortion results in an increased number of preborn lives taken. Second, government funding of abortion implicates the consciences of millions of American taxpayers who adamantly oppose the use of taxpayer funding to contribute to the abortion industry in any way, shape, or form.

For these reasons, **the ERLC urges Congress to include House-passed language expanding protections against federal funding being used for abortion and abortion-related travel in the final NDAA.**

**2. Southern Baptists oppose the use of Department of Defense funds for gender transition services and surgical procedures.** As stated in the 2023 [Resolution](#) On Opposing Gender Transitions, we are fundamentally opposed to “gender transition” interventions and view such interventions as a futile quest to change one’s sex and a direct assault on God’s created order.

[Article III](#) of *The Baptist Faith & Message*, declares that “every person . . . possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love” and that God created “male and female as the crowning work of His creation. . . . The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation.” Maintaining the dignity and respect of God’s creation includes both opposing distortions of this created order and lovingly coming alongside those who may be experiencing gender dysphoria.

As Southern Baptists, we believe God has ordained government for the purpose of executing justice, praising that which is good and punishing those who do evil. Any federal funding of gender-transition services cultivates injustice by violating the consciences of taxpayers who oppose such services and by perpetrating irreversible bodily harm against our neighbors. Additionally, such usage of funding prevents the government from achieving its underlying purpose of “praising that which is good” by funding the praise and execution of evil.

As a result of our deeply held convictions regarding gender-transition services, **the ERLC urges Congress to include House-passed language in the NDAA to ensure Department of Defense funding is not used for harmful gender-transition services and procedures.**



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**3. Southern Baptists support parental leave policies that prioritize strong families with involved parents.** We believe that God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society; additionally, parents have a responsibility to teach and lead their children through exhibiting a consistent, faithful lifestyle and through loving care. Policies that facilitate active involvement of a parent who has served in the armed forces in cases of birth, adoption, and long-term foster care are beneficial not only to the family unit, but also to society at large.

In light of that commitment to the flourishing of families, **the ERLC urges Congress to include House-passed provisions Sec. 1118 and Sec. 601 that expand paid parental leave eligibility.**

As you weigh many important matters in the final NDAA negotiations, we urge you to prioritize addressing these issues that deeply matter to Southern Baptists and to millions of American taxpayers who share our convictions regarding the sanctity of life, the fundamental realities of gender and sexuality, and support for families.

As always, we commit to praying for each of you as you navigate these difficult issues and ask God to grant you wisdom and discernment. Thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Respectfully,

Frederick Brent Leatherwood  
President  
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission  
of the Southern Baptist Convention