



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

2024

PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

By Brent Leatherwood and Hannah Daniel

The second session of the 118th Congress is now underway, and it begins as the nation is grappling with war around the world, looming government funding deadlines, and an election cycle. Congress reflects the deep division felt across our nation with a Democratic president, a narrow Democratic majority in the United States Senate, and a slim Republican majority in the House. The first session of this Congress proved to be wildly unproductive and crippled by intraparty fighting, culminating in the historic ouster of a Speaker of the House. Congress left 2023 without funding the government and with little progress made on dozens of priorities.

It is in the midst of this dysfunction and division that we must find a way to press forward on priorities relevant to the mission of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission: protecting life, safeguarding religious liberty, bolstering marriage and families, and upholding human dignity.

As always, we will work to build consensus on the issues listed in this document and others in our portfolio with officials across our federal government. On some of these issues there may prove to be broad bipartisan support already. On other issues, there will be much less consensus in a divided and increasingly polarized America. Nevertheless, whether issues are popular or not, we have the opportunity to bear witness, to seek to persuade, and to build the bridges necessary to make a difference. It is through this consistent advocacy that we can effectively represent our churches while bringing the hope of the gospel to Washington, D.C.

In addition to our work with the executive and legislative branches of the federal government, the ERLC will continue advocacy before the judicial branch on matters consistent with our mission. We will continue to work in partnership with Baptist 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 an outline of the core public policy priorities for this Commission over the next year.

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 & Message* summarizes the biblical revelation that every person bears the image of God, and thus, is worthy of protection and dignity, regardless of age, level of ability, or stage of development.

We must find a way to press forward on priorities relevant to the mission of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission: protecting life, safeguarding religious liberty, bolstering marriage and families, and upholding human dignity.



The ERLC will always advocate for preborn lives to be protected. Following the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision in 2022, we’ve seen both monumental gains for life in many states and new challenges emerge, such as rising availability of chemical abortion drugs and “abortion tourism.” We must persuade our lawmakers that the federal government still has an important role to play in protecting life and combating this evil in all forms. In our advocacy with the federal government and the courts, we will seek to both protect previous gains in these areas and to persuade others to consider the dignity of human lives too often counted as invisible or disposable. Here are some aspects of our federal pro-life legislative priorities:

- **Protect Pro-life Riders in the Congressional Appropriations Process:** Each year as we carefully analyze congressional 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. In recent years, we have seen serious threats to the Hyde Amendment. It was ultimately a significant victory for these riders to be included in the fiscal year 2023 appropriations package, and we must continue advocating for their inclusion in fiscal year 2024 and 2025 packages. We will work to preserve the Hyde Amendment to prevent government-funded violence against preborn children and to protect citizens from being coerced into violating their consciences by using their tax dollars to support abortion, something we believe is unjust. Other pro-life amendments include the Weldon, Siljander, Dornan, Kemp-Kasten, and Dickey-Wicker Amendments which protect life and consciences at home and abroad. All of these pro-life riders are important and must be protected.

Southern Baptists spoke to pro-life appropriations protections at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and in 2021 through the [Resolution on Taxpayer Complicity in Abortion and the Hyde Amendment](#).

- **Ending the Proliferation of Chemical Abortions:** Chemical abortion is a method that uses an abortifacient to stimulate uterine contractions and end the pregnancy in a process similar to miscarriage. According to the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute, chemical abortions made up [53% of all abortions in 2021](#). As many states severely restricted or banned access to surgical abortion following the *Dobbs* decision in 2022,



this number is likely now much higher. Because these drugs not only take the life of a preborn child but also pose serious threats to the women who take them, the ERLC has previously asked the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to categorize the abortion pill mifepristone as an “imminent hazard to the public health.” However, the FDA under the Biden administration has moved to increase access by permanently allowing these abortion pills to be delivered by mail. In January of 2023, the FDA moved to allow local retail pharmacies to dispense these drugs in states where it is legal, furthering the accessibility of these life-taking drugs and putting more women and preborn children at risk. The ERLC continues to push back against mail-order abortion drugs and supports federal legislation, such as the SAVE Moms and Babies Act, which would codify regulatory standards into federal law, protecting both preborn children and mothers from harm caused by such medication.

Southern Baptists spoke to chemical abortion at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and at the 2019 annual meeting through a [Resolution on Protecting Religious Liberty](#).

- **Respond to the *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. FDA* decision:** The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear oral arguments in *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. FDA*, a case challenging the removal of important safety precautions from the prescription of mifepristone, a chemical abortion drug. One in five women who take the drug will experience complications that require further medical attention. In the summer of 2023, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that significant restrictions to the drug must be reinstated, including in-person medical visits, stopping mail-order chemical abortions, and limiting usage to the first seven weeks of pregnancy. The ERLC is urging the Supreme Court to uphold this decision that will save preborn lives and protect women.

The ERLC will always advocate for preborn lives to be protected.

Southern Baptists spoke to chemical abortion at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and at the 2019 annual meeting through a [Resolution on Protecting Religious Liberty](#).

- **Oppose the Women’s Health Protection Act:** The Women’s Health Protection Act 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. Though current congressional dynamics make this bill's passage unlikely, the ERLC continues to educate lawmakers about the harms of this bill. The ERLC and the pro-life community strongly opposed this bill and will continue to do so in the upcoming year.

Southern Baptists spoke to abortion at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and in 2021 through the [Resolution on Taxpayer Complicity in Abortion and the Hyde Amendment](#).

- **Support the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act:** Since the enactment of the Hyde Amendment in 1977, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, 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 supports elective abortion.

Southern Baptists spoke to abortion at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and in 2021 through the [Resolution on Taxpayer Complicity in Abortion and the Hyde Amendment](#).

- **Support the Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act:** Federal law does not adequately protect born children who survive 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 healthcare practitioner present when a child is born alive following an attempted abortion to, first, exercise the same degree of care reasonably provided to any other child born alive at the same gestational age, and, second, ensure the child is immediately admitted to a hospital. This important bill passed the House of Representatives with a vote of 220-210 in early 2023 but remains unlikely to move forward in the Senate.

Southern Baptists have passed over 20 resolutions speaking to the issue of abortion in the last 40 years, most recently at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#).

- **Support Federal Abortion Restrictions:** Though the Supreme Court in the *Dobbs* ruling allowed states to once again determine how abortion should be regulated or



limited, Congress may still enact further restrictions. As it has for decades, the ERLC continues to advocate for the complete end of abortion while supporting legislation that saves as many lives as possible now, such as the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act and the Heartbeat Protection Act. Currently, the U.S. is one of only seven nations in the world that allow elective abortions after 20 weeks post-fertilization. The Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act would prohibit the 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 or 117th Congress. The Heartbeat Protection Act prohibits abortion after a fetal heartbeat is detected except to save the life of the mother. The ERLC will advocate for legislation that further restricts the availability of abortion across the country as we work toward completely ending abortion, including addressing any factors that may contribute to any perceived need for it.

Southern Baptists have passed over 20 resolutions speaking to the issue of abortion in the last 40 years, most recently at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#).

- **Oppose “Abortion Tourism”:** As many states across the country moved to ban or severely restrict abortion following the *Dobbs* decision, we saw moves from both the Biden administration and corporate America to promote and provide resources for pregnant women seeking abortion to travel to states where it remains legal. The ERLC has strongly advocated against the use of any use of taxpayer funds toward these efforts and is looking for new ways to prohibit the use of federal funding to subsidize the abortion industry.

Southern Baptists spoke to abortion at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and in 2021 through the [Resolution on Taxpayer Complicity in Abortion and the Hyde Amendment](#).

- **Expand Hyde Protections to Prohibit Taxpayer-Funded Abortion Travel:** Following the *Dobbs* decision, the Biden administration made several moves to expand abortion access and to push back on abortion restrictions across states where it was limited. One such action was the release of an Interim Final Rule that allows for taxpayer-funded abortion on demand at Veterans Affairs hospitals across the country, preempting any relevant state laws. Other actions have used taxpayer dollars to pay



for travel and leave costs for servicewomen, as well as unaccompanied immigrant girls at the border to receive abortions. The ERLC is advocating for new Hyde-like protections to be added to the relevant appropriations bills to prevent taxpayer dollars from funding any aspect of this horrific procedure.

Southern Baptists spoke to abortion at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and in 2021 through the [Resolution on Taxpayer Complicity in Abortion and the Hyde Amendment](#).

- **Oppose the Biden Administration’s Pro-Abortion Regulatory Agenda:** With no ability to expand abortion access through congressional action, the Biden administration has turned to the regulatory process to push forward its pro-abortion agenda. In 2023, the administration pushed forward changes that expanded the “contraceptive mandate,” reformed HIPAA for abortions, mandated abortions be provided to unaccompanied immigrant girls at the border, and required employers to provide leave for employees to obtain abortion. Many of these regulations will be finalized in 2024, and additional changes may be proposed. The ERLC will continue to push back on all of these efforts alongside our partners through filing public comments and engaging in the federal rulemaking process.

We must persuade our lawmakers that the federal government still has an important role to play in protecting life and combatting this evil in all forms.

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- **Support the Work of Pregnancy Resource Centers:** Pregnancy Resource Centers have been on the front line of serving and providing care for women and their families for decades. Following the *Dobbs* decision, many of these centers were violently attacked and have faced growing hostility. Since then, we’ve seen growing attempts to hinder the work of these centers and categorize them as proponents of misinformation, even by state governments. Yelp and other search engines moved to label these centers in a way that casts doubt on the legitimacy of services that they provide.



In addition to pushing back on these efforts, the ERLC supports a new piece of legislation, the Pregnancy Center Support Act, which would incentivize donations to these lifesaving organizations.

Southern Baptists have passed over 20 resolutions speaking to the issue of abortion in the last 40 years, most recently at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#).

- **Strengthen International Pro-Life Work:** For decades, the abortion industry has been working to have an “international right to abortion” 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 while also supporting international pro-life efforts. In addition, the ERLC will continue to advocate for protections for life in international aid funding.

Southern Baptists spoke to abortion at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#) and in 2021 through the [Resolution on Taxpayer Complicity in Abortion and the Hyde Amendment](#).

- **Oppose Physician-Assisted Suicide and all Euthanasia Efforts:** Physician-assisted suicide is currently legal in 10 states and the District of Columbia. This practice is 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 suffering ought not be cause for death. Hospice and palliative care options provide compassionate and ethical treatment that recognize human dignity. Our goal now on Capitol Hill is largely one of education, even among those who we otherwise would expect to already share our convictions about assisted suicide.

Southern Baptists spoke to physician-assisted suicide at the 1996 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Assisted Suicide](#).

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

Our Baptist ancestors in the U.S. 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.

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 & Message* summarizes the biblical teaching on religious liberty and freedom of conscience, a Baptist distinctive. Moreover, our Baptist ancestors in the U.S. 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 and in our advocacy—a legacy of religious freedom for all people, not just for those who share our beliefs. Recent years have seen simultaneous gains for religious freedom in the courts and threats from administrative and legislative action. We expect some of the following to be issues of particular concern in 2024.

- **Oppose The Equality Act:** Multiple pieces of legislation introduced in recent years aim to, at their most extreme, codify the demands of the sexual revolution and radically reshape religious freedom in the U.S. 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 health-care professionals and faith-based hospitals, undermine civil rights protections for



women and girls, and ultimately steamroll the consciences of millions of Americans. Though this bill is unlikely to pass in this Congress, the ERLC believes that this bill represents the most significant threat to religious liberty ever considered in Congress. We will continue to lead efforts to oppose the Equality Act and educate lawmakers regarding the dangers it poses.

Southern Baptists spoke to the Equality Act at the 2021 annual meeting through the [Resolution On the Equality Act](#).

- **Oppose attacks on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act:** The ERLC opposes 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. Additionally, there has been a growing trend among both parties to explicitly remove RFRA protections in legislation touching many different issues. Our religious freedom protections cannot be compromised on the altar of political expediency or partisanship. The ERLC will diligently track these developments and advocate for the full application of RFRA protections in all contexts.

Southern Baptists spoke to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act at the 2016 annual meeting through the [Resolution on Biblical Sexuality and The Freedom Of Conscience](#).

- **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 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.

Southern Baptists spoke to religious liberty at the 2012 annual meeting through a [Resolution on Protecting Religious Liberty](#).

- **Support the Conscience Protection Act:** No healthcare worker should have to compromise their deeply held beliefs in order to administer care. Now, both in a post-Roe world and as our country's views on issues of sexuality and gender have



shifted rapidly, healthcare providers are being increasingly mandated to participate in or provide insurance coverage for procedures and practices 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 such legislation is critical to curb conscience abuses across the country.

Southern Baptists spoke to conscience protections at the the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Christ's Sole Lordship Over Every Human Conscience](#), the 2019 annual meeting through a [Resolution on Protecting Religious Liberty](#), and at the 2016 annual meeting through the [Resolution on Biblical Sexuality and The Freedom Of Conscience](#).

- **Oppose the Biden Administration's Regulatory Actions:** As congressional gridlock has intensified, the Biden administration has turned to the regulatory process to push forward its agenda. Many of these new rules have included provisions that threaten the religious liberty and conscience rights of Americans. In 2023, the ERLC pushed back on efforts that would require foster parents to “affirm” a child’s chosen gender, limit the conscience rights of healthcare professions, restrict religious expression on college campuses, and redefine sex as “sexual orientation and gender identity” in anti-discrimination provisions. Many of these regulations will be finalized in 2024 and additional changes are likely to be proposed. The ERLC will continue to push back on these efforts alongside our partners through filing public comments, engaging in the federal rulemaking process and supporting legislation like the Protecting Religious Freedom for Foster Families Act which would undo the harms of these regulations.

Southern Baptists spoke to conscience protections at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Christ's Sole Lordship Over Every Human Conscience](#), at the 2016 annual meeting through the [Resolution on Biblical Sexuality and The Freedom Of Conscience](#), and at the 2012 annual meeting through a [Resolution on Protecting Religious Liberty](#).

- **Support the Safeguarding Charity Act:** In recent years, two lower courts have ruled that simply holding tax-exempt status means that an organization has accepted federal financial assistance and is thus subject to all regulations that apply to those receiving federal funding. Many faith-based organizations explicitly reject federal



funds that could bolster their work because such regulations would require them to compromise their most deeply held beliefs. A new bill, the Safeguarding Charity Act, seeks to get ahead of this trend and protect religious liberty by clearly stating in the law that tax-exempt status does not equate to federal financial assistance. The ERLC supports this legislation and will advocate for its swift passage.

Southern Baptists spoke to religious liberty at the 2012 annual meeting through a [Resolution on Protecting Religious Liberty](#).

- **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. Our government should welcome the generosity of citizens at all levels of income who desire to help their neighbors. 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 have seen 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. The ERLC will continue to support the Charitable Act which remedies this problem.

Southern Baptists spoke to charitable giving in the 2013 [Resolution On Tithing, Stewardship, and the Cooperative Program](#).

- **Combat Global Antisemitism:** Following the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and Israel's subsequent response, there has been a significant rise in antisemitism both domestically and abroad. We have seen alarming tolerance for antisemitic rhetoric and actions on college campuses across the country and at many of our global institutions, such as the United Nations. After the horrific attack on Israel, the ERLC led in drafting and galvanizing support for an [Evangelical Statement in Support of Israel](#), and we will continue to build support for Israel's right to exist and defend themselves. Through collaborative action with like-minded organizations, we will work against such anti-Semitism at the United Nations and defend victims of antisemitic incidents wherever they happen.

Southern Baptists spoke to antisemitism at the 2016 annual meeting through the [Resolution on Prayer and Support for Israel](#), the 2003 annual meeting through the



[*Resolution on Anti-Semitism*](#), the 1981 annual meeting through the [*Resolution on Anti-Semitism*](#), and the 1972 annual meeting through the [*Resolution on Anti-Semitism*](#).

- **Support Protections for the Uyghur People in China:** 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. Specifically 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. They are also subjected to physiological and, oftentimes, physical persecution, and their cultural heritage and practices are being erased. The ERLC also 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 toward alleviating their persecution. In 2021, the Southern Baptist Convention was the first denomination to pass a resolution rightly calling what is happening to the Uyghur people a genocide. The ERLC continues to urge the Biden administration to prioritize religious freedom and human rights in its negotiations with China and supports the Uyghur Policy Act, which would increase the prioritization of this issue in U.S. foreign policy.

*Southern Baptists spoke to the protections of Uyghur people at the 2021 annual meeting through the [*Resolution On The Uyghur Genocide*](#).*

- **Advocate for the Elimination of Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws:** The tragic case of Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi and many others in 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.

*Southern Baptists spoke to international religious freedom at the 1997 annual meeting through the [*Resolution On Religious Persecution*](#).*



- **Support the designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern:** Each year, the U.S. Department of State releases a list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) where religious freedom is severely restricted and persecution is most intense. This designation is accompanied by sanctions and penalties that make this designation an important tool in promoting religious freedom internationally. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in 2023 named Nigeria as the most dangerous place to be a Christian with hundreds killed for their faith each year. Despite this intense persecution, the State Department has ignored USCIRF’s recommendations and not designated Nigeria as a CPC the previous three years. The ERLC will continue to urge the Department of State to take this vital action. We have specifically supported H.Res.82, which calls on the department to make this designation.

Southern Baptists spoke to the international persecution of Christians at the 2015 annual meeting through the [Resolution On The Persecuted Church Worldwide](#).

Marriage and Family

“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 & 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. Aspects of this particular advocacy in 2024 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 pushing back on the alarming religious liberty trends discussed above in the adoption and foster care systems, we are advocating for policies that would support and strengthen adoption, making it both more affordable and accessible. One such policy, the Adoption Tax Credit Refundability Act, would restore the refundability of the Adoption Tax Credit and make more families eligible for its assistance in easing the financial burden of adoption.

The Baptist Faith & Message affirms the biblical teaching of marriage and family as creation ordinances and blessings from God, foundational to human flourishing.

Southern Baptists spoke to adoption and foster care at the 2009 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Adoption and Orphan Care](#).

- **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 U.S. 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.



Southern Baptists spoke to adoption and foster care at the 2009 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Adoption and Orphan Care](#).

- **Ensure Intercountry Adoption Remains a Viable Option:** In fiscal year 2022, only 1,517 children were welcomed into families through intercountry adoption. Though the COVID-19 pandemic certainly played a leading role, the reasons for this decline vary, from certain countries completely halting their intercountry programs to other countries placing more children in homes domestically. There has 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, which is certainly good news and ought to be encouraged. However, there are still millions of orphans worldwide waiting to be raised in a family where they are known and loved. Intercountry adoption must remain a viable option for welcoming children into homes, and we must do all we can to facilitate those adoptions. 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.

Southern Baptists spoke to adoption and foster care at the 2009 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Adoption and Orphan Care](#).

- **Support Pro-Family Policy in a Post-Roe World:** 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. An essential aspect of our advocacy for life in this post-Roe world must be for policies that address financial insecurity and other key factors that drive women to seek abortions. The ERLC will advocate for policies that remedy marriage penalties, empower abortion-vulnerable women to choose life, and provide baseline levels of support for new parents. This is consistent with the 2022 SBC Resolution that urged a focus on “pro-life and pro-family policies that serve and support vulnerable women, children, and families” as we work to “eliminate any perceived need for the horror of abortion.”

Southern Baptists spoke to pro-family policy at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Anticipation of a Historic Moment in the Pro-life Movement](#).

- **Oppose Harmful “Gender Transition” Surgeries and Procedures:** In recent years we have seen alarming increases in the number of individuals, many of whom are



minors, undergo physically damaging “gender transition” surgeries and procedures. In addition to going against God’s good design for sex and gender, these surgeries and procedures flaunt sound medical practice and do lasting harm to their victims. Though many states have taken action to ban these procedures, it remains legal and widely available in much of the country. The ERLC is advocating for these procedures on minors to be outlawed and supports the Protecting Minors from Medical Malpractice Act, which provides conscience protections for medical providers and ensures parents and children affected by “gender transition” surgeries and procedures have a private right of action.

Southern Baptists spoke to “gender transitions” at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Opposing “Gender Transitions.”](#)

- **Oppose Taxpayer Funding for “Gender Transition” Surgeries and Procedures:**

It is unconscionable that taxpayer dollars would be used to fund “gender transition” surgeries and procedures that harm those experiencing gender dysphoria and that millions of Americans find objectionable. However, restrictions are not currently in place that prevent this usage of funds in federal appropriations. In recent years, we’ve seen the Biden administration expand the use of taxpayer funds to pay for these practices for members of the military, children arriving at the border, and others. The ERLC will continue to advocate each year for new provisions to be added to the National Defense Authorization Act and annual appropriations bills to address this problem and will support the End Taxpayer Funding for Gender Experimentation Act, which offers a permanent solution.

Southern Baptists spoke to “gender transitions” at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Opposing “Gender Transitions.”](#)

- **Support Parental Rights:** God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of our society, and consequently, parents have been given the rights and responsibilities of raising and caring for their children. Recent years have seen increased challenges to these rights in areas of education, online access, and matters of gender and sexuality. In 2023, the ERLC worked with numerous Baptist state conventions to oppose laws that hid information about a child’s adopted gender identity from his or her parents. The ERLC will continue to actively oppose and work against these efforts in the courts while also supporting federal legislation, including the Families’ Rights and Responsibilities Act, which further strengthens the rights of parents.



Southern Baptists spoke to the rights of parents at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Opposing “Gender Transitions”](#) and at the 2005 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Educating Children](#).

- **Support Protections for Children Online:** With many children gaining unsupervised access to the internet at younger and younger ages, there has been an explosion in awareness of the harms this is bringing to many children. New data has demonstrated the detrimental effects on mental health, learning, and self-image that have come as a result from unhindered access for minors. Current laws allow much of this to happen without the knowledge or consent of parents. More must be done to prevent children from accessing harmful content, such as pornography, and to empower parents in overseeing the online activity of their children. One such proposal that the ERLC is advocating for is the Eyes on the Board Act which requires schools to block access to social media sites and develop screen time policies in order to receive federal resources in the form of E-Rate funding.

Southern Baptists spoke to the protection of children from various forms of media at the 2005 annual meeting in the [Resolution On Educating Children](#).

- **Oppose Marijuana Expansion:** Though a number of states have moved to legalize marijuana, it remains illegal under federal law. Increased marijuana usage has been shown in numerous studies to have deleterious effects on families and communities. The SAFER Banking Act seeks to protect banking institutions who provide financial services to cannabis-related businesses, allowing U.S. banks to work with marijuana businesses without the threat of fines or penalties. Because of this, the SAFER Banking Act would further encourage the growth of the already debilitating drug epidemic that sweeps our nation. This legislation nearly became law in the 117th Congress, and the ERLC will continue to oppose it and any other efforts toward federal marijuana legalization that may arise in this new Congress. Additionally, in 2023 the Biden administration began the process to reschedule marijuana from a Schedule I drug to a Schedule III drug under the Controlled Substances Act. This move would significantly loosen restrictions on marijuana, taking significant steps toward full legalization. The ERLC will continue to oppose these efforts to expand the availability of marijuana in our communities.

Southern Baptists spoke to recreational marijuana at the 1973 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Alcohol And Other Drugs](#).



Human Dignity

“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 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 por-

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 to a gospel that saves all who believe without partiality.

nography. 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 & Message* both summarizes the biblical revelation that

every person bears the image of God, and thus, is worthy of protection and dignity, regardless of age, level of ability, or stage of development, and echoes the biblical mandate to seek justice and righteousness, especially for those who are vulnerable. 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 to a gospel that saves all who believe without partiality. This reality that all bear the image of God and hold immeasurable dignity and value spurs on our commitment to the following priorities for this year:

- **Support a Permanent Solution for Dreamers:** With litigation on its way to the Supreme Court that will likely end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, these young immigrants who were brought to the U.S. by their parents remain in an unstable situation. These immigrants broke no law, and yet they remain without



permanent legal status. Now young adults, “Dreamers”—many of whom have families of their own with children who are U.S. citizens—are workers, students, and positive contributors to our communities. The ERLC will continue to urge Congress to act to provide a legislative pathway to permanent status for these individuals.

Southern Baptist spoke to immigration and refugees at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Wisely Engaging Immigration](#), the 2018 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration](#), and the 2011 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration and The Gospel](#).

- **Rebuild the Refugee Resettlement Program:** Though President Biden set an ambitious goal of resettling 125,000 refugees in fiscal year 2023, the U.S. only successfully resettled about 60,000 individuals. While that is much lower than the goal, it is actually much higher than previous years. Additionally, in 2023, the Biden administration launched a pilot program allowing for private sponsorship of refugees known as Welcome Corps. Though more must still be done to rebuild the infrastructure needed to quickly resettle those who are persecuted, including many brothers and sisters in Christ, these are encouraging trends and opportunities for Christians to engage those who arrive in our communities. 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. As part of that advocacy, the ERLC has urged Congress to give priority refugee status to Uyghurs and Hong Kongers fleeing persecution from the Chinese Communist Party. Additionally, the ERLC has urged Congress to maintain the longstanding, bipartisan Lautenberg Amendment in fiscal year 2024 appropriations which provides a vital refugee pathway to religious minorities, including many evangelicals, in former Soviet Union countries and Iran.

Southern Baptist spoke to immigration and refugees at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Wisely Engaging Immigration](#), the 2018 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration](#), and the 2011 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration and The Gospel](#).

- **Support the Afghan Adjustment Act:** As part of the SBC’s longstanding commitment to serving refugees, many Christians and churches were on the frontlines in welcoming thousands of our Afghan allies and other vulnerable Afghans evacuees following the fall of Afghanistan in 2021. Because of the significant backlogs in the resettlement program and the urgency of the situation, these individuals were brought



to the U.S. through a tool known as humanitarian parole. Many of these individuals helped our military at great risk to themselves and their families based on promises that they would receive visas to the U.S. Due to their expiring legal status, these individuals will either be added to the already significant asylum backlog, become undocumented, or return to Afghanistan and face intense persecution. The Afghan Adjustment Act remedies this problem and provides a path to permanent legal status after additional vetting for these Afghan parolees. The ERLC supports this legislation and will be working for its passage this year, before many Afghans' authorization in 2024.

Southern Baptist spoke to immigration and refugees at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Wisely Engaging Immigration](#), the 2018 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration](#), and the 2011 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration and The Gospel](#).

- **Support Border Security Enhancements and Asylum Reforms:** December 2023 brought the highest number of arrivals to the U.S.-Mexico border ever recorded. At the same time, members of Congress have been involved in lengthy negotiations over policy changes to our border security and asylum processes. At the 2023 annual meeting, Southern Baptists called on lawmakers to “provide clear guidance for immigrants and asylum seekers,” “maintain robust avenues for valid asylum claimants seeking refuge,” and “prioritize measures that secure our borders and to provide adequate resources to border patrol and those working in our immigration system.” It is with this guidance that the ERLC will continue to urge Congress to pass needed immigration reforms that uphold our ideals of order, the rule of law, and compassion.

Southern Baptist spoke to immigration and refugees at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Wisely Engaging Immigration](#), the 2018 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration](#), and the 2011 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Immigration and The Gospel](#).

- **Support Further Criminal Justice Reform:** The ERLC will continue to advocate for reforms that focus on fairness, rehabilitation, and recognize the dignity of those in prison. Two such bipartisan 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 proven successful in aiding recipients with employment and housing—two factors necessary for successful reintegration. The EQUAL Act would remedy the disparity in federal sentencing for crack and powder cocaine-related crimes. Over 40 states have already corrected this unjust, inconsistent practice. An additional bill, the Preventing Violence against Female Inmates Act, would require that those in prison be housed with those of the same sex, providing greater protection to women in prison.

Southern Baptists spoke to criminal justice reform at the 2013 annual meeting through the [Resolution On America’s Growing Prison Population](#).

- **Combat the Epidemic of Mass Shootings and Gun Violence:** 2023 was one of the deadliest years in the U.S. for mass shootings and gun violence. In 2018, messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention gave support for “preventative measures that would reduce gun violence and mass shootings while operating in accordance with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution,” and in 2022, messengers urged lawmakers “to take concrete steps, towards solutions that uphold the dignity and value of every human life, especially the most vulnerable among us, and to minimize the threat of gun violence throughout our society.” In many instances, commonsense steps can be taken to increase opportunities for intervention that would prevent those who are struggling from hurting themselves or others. The ERLC will advocate for these types of measures that prevent the loss of innocent life to the evil of gun violence and mass shootings and provide help to those suffering severe mental distress.

Southern Baptists spoke to mass shootings and gun violence at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On the Imago Dei and the Helpful Content Submitted in Several Resolutions](#) and at the 2018 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Gun Violence and Mass Shootings](#).

- **Support Payday Lending Regulations:** Short-term payday loans often come with deceptive annual interest rates of over 400%, trapping the poor in a vicious cycle. In the 117th Congress, 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. The ERLC will continue to advocate for this legislation and



work toward the regulation of an industry that has resulted in a devastatingly endless cycle of debt and despair for millions of Americans.

Southern Baptists spoke to payday lending at the 2014 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Predatory Payday Lending](#).

- **Oppose Efforts to Expand Gambling:** As nearly every state across the country has loosened restrictions on gambling, Americans spent approximately \$213 billion on legal betting alone in 2021. Online sports betting has spread rapidly, making it easier than ever to become trapped in the addictive and destructive cycle of gambling. Churches across the convention have repeatedly shared that this issue is a key driver in the tearing apart of marriages and families in their congregations. The ERLC is actively looking for ways to engage this issue and better regulate this harmful, predatory industry.

Southern Baptists spoke to gambling at the 2017 annual meeting through the [Resolution On The Sin Of Gambling](#).

- **Advocate for Anti-Human Trafficking Laws:** The evil of human trafficking has only grown and adapted alongside our ever changing technology, with much happening online. The ERLC will continue to advocate for anti-human trafficking legislation in Congress—particularly legislation aimed at supporting trafficking victims and increasing the responsibility of companies to remove this content from their platforms. Additionally, issues of trafficking are increasingly intertwined with other issues such as immigration and forced labor and must be an important part of policy conversations in those areas. Women and children in Central America face high levels of violence, including femicide, 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 U.S. to seek asylum protections. 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 these bipartisan efforts that protect the vulnerable.

Southern Baptists spoke to human trafficking at the 2013 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Human Trafficking](#), and the 2000 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Condemning The Trafficking Of Women And Children For Sexual Purposes](#).



- **Support Efforts to Shape Artificial Intelligence and Technology that Emphasize Human Dignity:** As our country wrestles with the new frontier of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, we’ve quickly seen both the incredible promise as well as the immense challenges that these new technologies pose for our society. We believe it is essential for lawmakers to proactively assess and develop policy solutions, ranging from work to warfare, for these technologies in a way that affirms the unique, God-given dignity and worth of human beings. In June, the SBC overwhelmingly passed a resolution offering guidelines on this topic, becoming the first denomination to make an official statement on the ethics of artificial intelligence. That resolution calls on policymakers to “proactively engage and shape these emerging technologies rather than simply respond to the challenges of AI and other emerging technologies after they have already affected our churches and communities.” The ERLC will continue to assist lawmakers in understanding these realities and advocate for policies in line with this call of human dignity and the common good.

Southern Baptists spoke to artificial intelligence at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution on Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies](#).

