



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

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STATE POLICY AGENDA

By Brent Leatherwood and Hannah Daniel

The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission assists Southern Baptist Convention churches by communicating and advocating for our moral and ethical concerns in the public arena. This “public arena” includes the vital work being done at both the federal and state levels, where we partner with other advocacy groups and our state conventions to address matters of concern to Southern Baptists.

While our advocacy work in Washington, D.C., remains a vital component of effective policy, the politically divided and often lengthy federal processes have resulted in weighty decisions being made at the state level. Just as the ERLC advocates for life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity at the national level, many of these same issues are currently being considered by state legislatures. Some of these include:

- gambling,
- conscience protections for medical professionals,
- prohibitions on “gender transition” procedures and prescriptions for children,
- opposing mail-order abortion pills that put both babies and mothers at risk,
- restricting predatory lending,
- and more.

Effective state-level engagement has been displayed following the historic 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* Supreme Court decision which overturned *Roe v. Wade* and freed up state and federal legislators to act against the horror of abortion. While we still advocate and pray for Congress to pass a permanent federal prohibition of abortion, the pro-life movement has adapted to fill in the gap of federal policy work by encouraging states to pass legislation that protects as many lives as possible, as quickly as possible. As of Jan. 8, 2024, [21 states](#) have restricted or prohibited access to abortion. Alongside our fellow Southern Baptists, we pray that the number of states will grow as we diligently work toward that goal.

We are also encouraged by the proliferation of pro-family and pro-life policies being proposed and passed in many states. These policies—from creating tax exemptions for diapers and baby formula to supporting pregnancy resource centers—protect and safeguard children and mothers targeted by the abortion industry, thereby enabling parents to choose life and undermining lies perpetuated by the abortion industry.

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With many state legislative sessions already underway, the ERLC has identified key state legislation that overlaps with Southern Baptist priorities of which we want government leaders, elected officials, Southern Baptist Convention affiliates, and partners in our state work to be aware. This agenda is not an exhaustive list of every policy priority,

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but rather, serves as a guide to equip Southern Baptists and lawmakers by providing examples embodying good policy that captures the concerns of Southern Baptists regarding the current debates happening at the state level. We examine these policies to chart a hopeful vision for public policy that will help individuals and communities thrive.

In releasing the first State Policy Agenda, we invite you to join us in envisioning a world where abortion is unthinkable, where religious liberty is celebrated, where human beings are valued as made in God's image, and where Southern Baptists clearly see the Lord being glorified through their

state government. For any of these proposals, *we encourage interested readers to engage with their Baptist state convention and local lawmakers*, whose teams will have the latest information about developments related to these bills.

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." (*Baptist Faith & Message*)

As the *Baptist Faith and Message* states, every person, regardless of age, level of ability, or stage of development, bears the image of God and is worthy of protection and dignity. A life is valuable and worthy of protection, not because of its utility, but because of its fundamental design by the God who gives and sustains life (Heb. 1:3) and who called his creation "good" (Gen. 1:31). This sanctity of life extends from the life of a preborn child in his or her mother's womb to end-of-life care.

In the current political landscape following the 2022 *Dobbs* Supreme Court decision,



the pro-life movement continues to adapt and grow in effectiveness, seeking to prohibit even the “perceived need” for abortion. Where the federal government aims to subvert state laws that prohibit or restrict abortion, the work of state policy to protect life remains most effective when states undermine the lies parents are told by the abortion industry and equip parents to choose life.

While we are encouraged by the many states that have already enacted restrictions or prohibitions on abortion since *Roe* was overturned, we’re also concerned by the ongoing evolution of concerning trends in abortion. Some states such as California have offered to pay for mothers to travel and obtain an abortion by becoming “abortion destinations,” while others seek to enable the abortion industry through access to mail-order abortion pills.

Some specific policies that show how this is playing out are:

- **Supporting Abortion Restrictions:** Since the *Dobbs* decision, many states are working to enshrine and expand overall access to abortion and become “abortion destinations.” Some states such as Ohio have even amended the state constitution to safeguard future access to abortion or repealed pro-life laws previously in effect. Conversely, many states have already taken significant steps to restrict or prohibit abortion entirely in their state. It is our hope that other states will follow their lead and take further steps to protect the preborn. While attainable pro-life victories will look different across the country, it is important that each state work toward any positive steps it can to save lives.

Some examples of legislation we are encouraged to see filed this year include [Assembly Bill 975](#) in Wisconsin, which would ban abortion at 14 weeks. Additionally, we’re glad to see the [Born Alive Protection Act](#) in Kansas filed once again despite being vetoed after passage by the governor in April of 2023. This bill would provide legal protections for infants who are born alive regardless of the intent of the delivery and creates a right to legal action in the event a failed abortion results in a living child and physicians do not seek to provide adequate care. Though we hope to see these

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states eventually eradicate abortion, we are glad to see these incremental steps taken that will save precious preborn lives.

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](#).

- **Opposing Chemical Abortions:** A chemical abortion is a method that relies on a prescribed medication such as mifepristone to end a pregnancy. As surgical abortion procedures have declined, chemical abortions have risen, making up [53% of the total abortions in 2021](#). These drugs are harmful, both for the preborn child and for the women who take them and can experience severe health risks. In 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) increased access to such prescriptions by permanently allowing these abortion pills to be delivered via 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.

While we await a U.S. Supreme Court hearing in March and a final ruling this June on whether or not the FDA can allow such mail-order abortion drugs, we're also tracking state legislation that either expands or limits such drugs from being available through state-based providers in the meantime. One such egregious example is in New Hampshire through [Senate Bill 567](#), which directs the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services to “protect and expand access to” abortion under the deceptive label of “necessary women’s reproductive health” access, specifically including the abortion drug mifepristone.

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](#).

- **Promoting Pregnancy Resource Centers:** One concerning trend in state legislation is accusatory rhetoric that claims pregnancy resource centers are vestiges of misinformation. One such bill, the [Deceptive Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers Act](#) in Illinois, was signed into law in 2023 and relies on the claim that these centers engage in deceptive tactics and manipulation to prevent women from obtaining abortions. In reality, these centers (many of which are faith based) provide a variety of wrap-around care to help women choose life, ranging from free pregnancy tests



and ultrasounds to clothing and supply donations. Thankfully, this law is [no longer in effect](#) as of January 2024 due to a legal agreement reached between the State of Illinois' attorney general and concerned pro-life advocates.

We are closely monitoring other state legislatures who might consider this type of harmful legislation in their 2024 sessions. Through the ERLC's [Psalm 139 Project](#) and advocacy efforts, we continue to emphasize the excellent resources offered by these centers and protect their right to offer resources and help to desperate women.

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- **Opposing Taxpayer Funding for Abortion:** One of the most egregious examples of the predatory nature of the abortion industry is its desire to receive state and federal funding to provide for abortion and abortion-related travel. In doing so, not only is abortion expanded, but the consciences of taxpayers are steamrolled. We're glad to see some states such as Missouri through [House Bill 1563](#) taking necessary action against the misuse of taxpayer money by prohibiting public funds from being expended to any abortion facility or affiliate and hope to see more states take similar action.

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](#).

- **Opposing Physician-Assisted Suicide:** Just as the sanctity of life and its advocacy must be recognized for the preborn child in the womb, it must also be recognized for the individual nearing the end of their life. Despite a terminal diagnosis or advanced age, Scripture and Christian ethics tell us the end of a person's life is in the hands of God, not mankind. It is the sad reality of our broken world that people will endure pain and suffering. Despite that reality, human dignity must be upheld and the *imago Dei* must be recognized.

Physician-assisted suicide refers to the decision of a patient to end his or her life through requesting a prescription from their medical provider, often as a result of a terminal medical diagnosis or advanced age. This practice is currently legal in 10 states and the District of Columbia. The ending of a human life by this means is in clear conflict with the Bible, and despite claims to the contrary, this practice undermines the very definition of healthcare. There is a concerted effort in many states to legalize



and expand this practice. For example, [Assembly Bill 781](#) in Wisconsin and Tennessee [House Bill 1710](#) would both permit a patient to seek physician-assisted suicide from their medical provider (Wisconsin with a diagnosis estimating six months to live, and Tennessee with a diagnosis estimating 15 days to live).

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 ... The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends.”
(*Baptist Faith & Message*)

The *Baptist Faith and Message* outlines the basis for the biblical teaching on religious liberty and freedom of conscience, a distinctive passed down to us from our Baptist predecessors, many of whom were imprisoned or executed as they stood for these truths. Additionally, 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-sanctioned religion. Recent

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Challenges to religious liberty come in a variety of different forms. Currently, through a complex web of court cases, legislation, and a long history of federal and state rulemaking, religious liberty protections in the U.S. generally remain strong and secure. However, the challenges to this fundamental right continue to occur with changes in administrations at the federal and state level and public attitudes; to ensure that this freedom

is safeguarded, the ERLC continues to advocate for the protection of religious liberty for all people throughout the policy arena, recognizing that religious liberty protections for one group represent religious liberty protections for all groups, including our fellow Southern Baptists.



The following examples show the key debates about religious liberty taking place through state legislation.

- **Supporting Religious Freedom Restoration Acts:** In 1993, Congress nearly-unanimously passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which prevented other laws passed on the federal level from including a substantial burden on an individual or group's religious freedom unless the federal government could meet the highest form of legal accountability. Many Supreme Court cases have relied on RFRA in rulings including *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores*.

The original intent was for RFRA to apply to all three branches of government and both federal and state governments; however, the Supreme Court has since ruled that the application of RFRA to the states was an overreach. In response, 24 state governments have passed their own RFRA, with more following suit. This year, the ERLC affirms three additional state RFRA's that have been filed in [Iowa](#), [Nebraska](#), and [Georgia](#) and remains hopeful more will follow.

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](#).

- **Supporting Conscience Protections for Healthcare Providers:** No healthcare worker must be compelled to compromise their deeply held beliefs in order to serve others. As our country's views on issues of sexuality and gender have rapidly shifted in our cultural moment, healthcare providers are increasingly required to participate in or provide insurance coverage for procedures and practices that conflict with their beliefs. In many states, there is meaningful advocacy work being done to protect these individuals from the ramifications of refusing to compromise their beliefs surrounding abortion through legislation that would not require an individual to perform or provide insurance coverage for abortion. For example, Oklahoma's [Senate Bill 1883](#), Iowa's [Senate Study Bill 3006](#), and Vermont's [Health Care Freedom of Conscience Act](#) provide and expand conscience protections for healthcare workers to ensure they do not have to choose between paving over their consciences and their duty as medical professionals.

Southern Baptists spoke to conscience protections at 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](#).



- Protecting Conscience Rights for Adoptive and Foster Families:** 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. Additionally, recent regulations from the Biden administration are bolstering these efforts by requiring prospective parents to “affirm” a child’s chosen gender identity. This leads to fewer families available for foster care and adoption. Some states are responding to these challenges by strengthening vital conscience and religious liberty protections for parents participating in the foster care and adoption systems. This year, multiple states, including Tennessee through the [Tennessee Adoptive and Foster Parent Protection Act](#) and Indiana through [Senate Bill 193](#), are considering such legislation.

Southern Baptists spoke to religious liberty and 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](#).

- Safeguarding Religious Expression on Campus:** The ERLC is aware of the rising number of court cases surrounding freedom of speech in school environments. In response, we’re encouraged to see some states taking action to protect First Amendment free speech and free expression provisions for their students, parents, and staff. As Southern Baptists well know, believing the gospel requires believers to completely reorder our lives; inherent in freedom of religion as our Founders intended it is both the freedom of belief and the freedom to express and practice that belief. One example of such meaningful and helpful religious freedom protections is shown in West Virginia through [Senate Bill 503](#), which strengthens protections for student groups on the campuses of institutions of higher education.

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

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.” (*Baptist Faith & Message*)

The *Baptist Faith and Message* affirms that the gifts of marriage and family are



blessings ordained by God since creation and are foundational for a well-functioning society and human flourishing. In contrast, the sexual revolution and its consequences for society have created a number of challenges to biblical truth at a high cost. Conflict over same-sex marriage, gender ideology, and foster care are areas where the traditional biblical sexual ethic of marriage between a biological man and woman, as well as clearly defined sexes, often clash with new cultural definitions.

At the ERLC, we often find these policy areas to be opportunities—to bring forth the redemptive truth of the gospel, to support life-giving changes by supporting incentives to biblical views of marriage, and ultimately, to care for our neighbor by stating the realities about their sex and gender ideology. Christians should continue to call for protections for children and parents and seek policies that uphold and affirm that reality.

The following are examples of the key debates about marriage and family occurring in state legislatures.

- **Supporting Biblical Marriage:** As Southern Baptists know, federal legislation and court decisions have often sought to undermine biblical definitions of marriage. While the ERLC continues to engage at the federal level, we’re also aware of some states that are considering expanding definitions of marriage currently provided in state law that deviate from the biblical definition of marriage as between one man and one woman. One such example is in the state of Florida, where [House Joint Resolution 167](#) would allow Floridians to vote on repealing part of the state constitution that defines marriage as solely between one man and one woman.

Southern Baptists spoke to a biblical view of marriage at the 2013 annual meeting through the [Resolution On “Same-Sex Marriage” And Civil Rights Rhetoric](#).

- **Opposing Surrogacy Industry:** Surrogacy refers to a woman, known as a “surrogate mother,” becoming pregnant with the intent to give birth and give the child to someone who cannot—or will not—bear biological children. The ERLC opposes surrogacy due to the vast ethical concerns, including exploitation of women, selling of children, violations

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of the marital covenant, and the use of embryo-destructive reproductive technology. While there are currently no federal surrogacy laws in place, many states permit this practice, and others are seeking to expand the practice. One such example is in Virginia through [House Bill 110](#), which repeals existing Virginia law prohibiting the practice of paid surrogacy within the state.

Southern Baptists spoke to the nuclear family and proper family formation at the 2003 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Kingdom Families](#).

- **Safeguarding Children from Harmful Gender Ideology:** An unfortunate reality of the sexual revolution in recent years is the detrimental effect it has had on children. Increasingly, children are the victims of this ideology. Through manipulation by adults, they are taught to express a self-determined gender identity and live this out through permanent disfigurement of their bodies. At the ERLC, we are pushing back against this narrative and believe that generations to come will see refugees from the sexual revolution flock to the redemptive hope of the gospel. Children experiencing gender dysphoria must be met with compassion and actual care, not with “affirming” practices that will leave lasting harm.

Many states have already taken action to ban such practices, such as Texas through the passage of [Senate Bill 14](#), which took effect in September 2023. Two pieces of legislation being considered this year are the [Child Protection Act](#) in Georgia and the [Children Deserve Help Not Harm Act](#) in South Carolina which would prohibit children from causing permanent harm to their bodies through “gender transitions” based on an often temporary self-identification.

Southern Baptists spoke to a biblical view of gender and sexuality at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Opposing “Gender Transitions,”](#) and at the 2014 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Transgender Identity](#). Southern Baptists also spoke to the protection of children from various forms of media at the 2005 annual meeting in the [Resolution On Educating Children](#).

- **Protecting Women in Sports:** Another unfortunate reality of harmful gender ideology is the disenfranchisement of women, who are increasingly excluded from opportunities for success that were specifically designed for women. The biggest example of this is in women’s sports, where biological men are permitted to compete against women time and again based on self-identification as a woman. Some states such as Virginia through the [Women’s Sports Bill](#) are pushing back on harmful gender



ideology by seeking to prohibit biological men from competing in women's sporting events. We hope to see other states consider such legislation.

Southern Baptists spoke to a biblical view of gender and sexuality at the 2023 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Opposing "Gender Transitions,"](#) and at the 2014 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Transgender Identity.](#)

- **Protecting Children from Pornography:** The evil of pornography has a devastating impact on all involved. This practice not only goes against a biblical sexual ethic, but it also objectifies victims, tears apart marriages and families, and increasingly is being accessed by children at earlier and earlier ages. While this content should not be consumed by anyone, there is a special duty on the state to protect children from this harmful content. Last year, states such as [North Carolina](#) and [Utah](#) enacted age verification requirements to prevent minors from accessing pornography, resulting in sites like PornHub completely removing access to this content in the state. This year, several other states are including similar legislation such as [West Virginia House Bill 4867](#) and [Indiana Senate Bill 17.](#)

Southern Baptists spoke to pornography at the 2001 annual meeting through the [Resolution On the Plague of Internet Pornography.](#)

- **Helping Families Flourish:** Increasingly, the cost of having a child is cited as the most common reason why parents choose abortion or choose to have fewer children. As Southern Baptists have repeatedly affirmed, children are a blessing from the Lord and a gift to any parent. Additionally, in this post-Roe era, it is vital that we meet the needs of abortion-vulnerable women and empower them to choose life. Some proposals, such as [Senate Bill 171](#) in Illinois, seek to alleviate these concerns and allow parents to care for their children by making items like diapers, baby wipes, and infant formulas tax exempt. Other states, such as Kansas through [House Bill 2429](#), are establishing "alternatives to abortion programs" that promote childbirth, provide adoption assistance, and support pregnancy support centers and maternity homes. We're also encouraged to see that Texas signed into law the ["Thriving Texas Families Act"](#) in 2023, which provides family support programs to serve at-risk families and childcare facilities in an effort to ensure more women continue to choose life.

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.](#)



Human Dignity

“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 ... to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love.” (*Baptist Faith & Message*)

As we see throughout Scripture, God has created a world and laws with clear boundaries and definitions. One way to care for our neighbor is by advocating for state and federal

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governments to provide clear boundaries begetting faithful citizens. For many of these issues, states play a unique role by enacting policies that either recognize or deny the dignity of a person. Often, moral and ethical policy issues of concern to Southern Baptists—pornography, predatory lending, addiction, and disparities in criminal law—are a byproduct of a cultural worldview that denies the fundamental dignity and worth of a person and a rejection

of just governing. In contrast, good legislation enacted by states reinforces the worth of each person and seeks to create an environment that promotes human flourishing by resolving unjust and unclear laws.

The following examples reflect some of the debates surrounding human dignity being debated by state governments:

- **Oppose Expansion of Substance Abuse and Addiction:** One concern voiced most repeatedly by state partners is that of the impact of substance abuse and addiction on local churches and communities. Though the federal government has been actively working to decriminalize marijuana through the [reclassification](#) of this drug by the FDA, marijuana remains highly addictive and increasingly accessible. Some states such as Virginia through [House Bill 698](#) and Kansas through [Senate Bill 135](#) are seeking to legalize marijuana or medical cannabis sales within their state, despite contradictions with existing federal law and the clear detrimental impact such legislation will have on their state.

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



- **Combat the Predatory Lending Industry:** Payday lending is an industry that preys on the poor through offering short-term, small-dollar loans at exorbitantly high interest rates. The average annual interest rate on a payday loan is 400%, trapping the poor in cycles of despair and debt. Some states such as Washington through [House Bill 1918](#) and South Carolina through [Senate Bill 67](#) are pushing back against these predatory practices by capping the interest rate on a payday loan at 36%.

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

- **Opposition to Gambling:** Gambling is a clear violation of the ways in which God has directed Christians to order our lives, and churches across the SBC have repeatedly expressed concern about the negative effects of gambling on the families we serve. In 2021, Americans spent approximately \$213 billion on legal betting alone. Since then, many states have expanded access to online sports betting, state lotteries, and other forms of gambling, making it easier than ever to become trapped in an addictive and destructive cycle. Through legislation like [Senate Bill 1434](#) in Oklahoma, [Senate Bill 386](#) in Georgia, and legislation we are anticipating being filed in Alabama, several states are considering expansions this year to gambling in their state.

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

- **Supporting Criminal Justice Reform:** One way God is glorified in government is through the just improvement, enforcement, and application of laws. In line with this, the ERLC continues to advocate for reforms that focus on fairness, redemptive rehabilitation, and recognize the dignity of persons in prison. Some states such as Florida through the [“Air Conditioning in Inmate Housing” bill](#) would make improvements that respect the dignity of those in prison and their safety by requiring air conditioning units in good working order to be available for all housing units. Other states such as Arizona through [House Bill 2047](#) would create a transition program through partnerships with local nonprofits to help perpetrators of nonviolent crimes assimilate into the local community after serving their sentence.

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



- **Ending the Epidemic of 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.” 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.”

Following the passage of these resolutions, 2023 was one of the deadliest years in the U.S. for mass shootings and gun violence. In many instances, sensible steps consistent with the Second Amendment can be taken at both the federal and the state level to increase opportunities for intervention that would prevent those who are struggling from hurting themselves or others. Some states are making meaningful progress in this area. One state, Tennessee, is taking a multi-front approach to the epidemic. For example, [House Bill 1640](#) and [House Bill 2101](#) ensure court records noting an individual’s mental health and likelihood to cause harm are added to the background check system. Additionally, in the aftermath of so many mass shootings, investigators have learned signals have been missed or not properly handled. On this front, [Senate Bill 2342](#) makes it a criminal act to threaten mass violence, and [House Bill 1625](#) creates a “duty to warn” if an actual threat of bodily harm is detected.

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](#).

- **Stopping Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse is an evil that the ERLC will unequivocally fight against. We, first and foremost, wish to see a world in which no one suffers any kind of abuse. Subsequently, we recognize the necessity of just policies that will prevent abuse and serve justice to abusers. The ERLC will remain a vocal advocate on this issue as we work for this evil to be confronted, for survivors to be supported, and for the vulnerable to be protected.

To this end, we are encouraged to see some states considering legislation in line with these goals. Reforms such as [Senate Bill 5280](#) in Washington and [Senate Bill 87](#) in Kansas would expand requirements for clergy and ministers to report the abuse or neglect of children. Missouri is also considering two proposals, [House Bill 1741](#) and [House Bill 1868](#), that would take steps to provide greater protections to non-profits



who share credible abuse allegations with other non-profits and expand protections for victims who wish to provide testimony through video.

Southern Baptists spoke to sexual abuse at the 2022 annual meeting through the [Resolution On Support for Consistent Laws Regarding Pastoral Sexual Abuse](#) and at the 2019 annual meeting through the [Resolution On The Evil Of Sexual Abuse](#).

