



August 26, 2024

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

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

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

I am writing to you as the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). The ERLC represents the public policy interests of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, with over 45,000 churches and nearly 13 million members.

As Congress continues negotiations for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Southern Baptists have several priorities for consideration: maintaining robust pro-life and conscience protections, resisting taxpayer-funded expansions of ethically dubious assisted reproductive technologies (ART), prohibiting the use of government funding for “gender transitions,” and ensuring the selective service is not expanded to include women.

1. Congress has both a duty and an obligation to protect preborn lives and ensure that the consciences of taxpayers are not implicated by the misuse of federal funding.

Congress itself has time and again expressed a desire to protect taxpayer consciences and remain steadfast in its long-standing position against taxpayer funding of the harmful and deceptive abortion industry. This is reflected in the existence and renewal of more than 20 pro-life appropriations provisions each fiscal year.

In response to the *Dobbs* decision in 2022, the Biden administration has sought to circumvent these funding restrictions from Congress by [directing](#) the Department of Defense to provide



reimbursement to service members for abortion-related lodging and travel. This policy ignores the intent of Congress and circumvents the implementation of newly enforced state abortion laws in an effort to push forward the administration's shameful agenda.

Southern Baptists believe each person is made in the image of God and is worthy of protection and care at every stage of life, regardless of age or ability. Therefore, the ERLC strongly opposes the misuse of federal taxpayer dollars in an attempt to subvert state law and end precious preborn lives in the name of "military readiness."

The ERLC supports [language](#) in the House-passed NDAA to prohibit funding for "abortion tourism" and protect vulnerable preborn lives. Millions of taxpayers around the country oppose abortion as a result of deeply held religious and moral beliefs, and we encourage Congress to ensure their consciences are not violated by supporting the grievous evil of abortion.

2. Congress should oppose expansions of federal funding for ARTs, including in vitro fertilization (IVF), and any such expansion must be accompanied by minimum baseline ethical standards of care.

Southern Baptists believe life is inherently valuable and endowed by God, regardless of the mechanism by which a precious preborn child is conceived. Additionally, we affirm that the desire to build families is a good desire. We grieve the impact of infertility on those seeking to expand their family, including many fellow Southern Baptists.

Southern Baptists recently passed a [resolution](#) on this subject, stating that we "reaffirm the unconditional value and right to life of every human being, including those in an embryonic stage, and to only utilize reproductive technologies consistent with that affirmation, especially in the number of embryos generated in the IVF process." Later on in this same resolution, Southern Baptists called upon the government to "restrain actions inconsistent with the dignity and value of every human being."

The fertility industry in the U.S. operates free from baseline regulations, requirements, and even reporting standards, with almost no protections for parents who undergo the process of IVF or for any embryos created. Contrary to the laws in other nations, the U.S. has no limitations on the number of embryos created at one time. There is no existing minimum standard of care for embryos being stored indefinitely and no enforced reporting or oversight from the Center for Disease Control (CDC).



Due to these grave ethical concerns, the ERLC is opposed to the taxpayer-funded expansion of assisted reproductive technology including IVF, as provided in both the House-passed and Senate versions of the NDAA. Both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) provisions expand IVF coverage under TRICARE for military members and their dependents. Additionally, the Senate language is not accompanied by clear ethical standards and even ambiguously allows for “other information, referrals, treatment, procedures, testing, medications, laboratory services, technologies, and services facilitating reproduction as determined appropriate by the Secretary of Defense.” Such language allows for future taxpayer funding of a variety of similarly morally egregious practices, including cloning, womb transplants for transgender individuals, or genetic modification of embryos.

Southern Baptists maintain serious ethical concerns about all of this, and the ERLC urges Congress to reject any expansion of taxpayer funding for such practices.

3. Congress must not permit the continued misuse of federal funding for “gender transition” services, procedures, and medications.

Southern Baptists believe we were created by God with intentionality and dignity. At a time when gender confusion is pervasive throughout our society, Southern Baptists affirm that there are no accidents in God’s good design. Furthermore, our biological sex and differences are a gift from the Lord. As a result, Southern Baptists believe that any attempt to deny or alter one’s sex through so-called “gender transitions” is both an affront to God’s good design and directly conflicts with human flourishing.

As indicated by this administration through [Executive Order 14004](#), the guise of “military readiness” is being used as an excuse to redirect existing funding to provide for gender transitions. Continuing to provide gender transitions paid for by taxpayer funding through the NDAA violates the consciences of millions of Americans who morally oppose such transitions on moral and ethical grounds as deeply harmful to their neighbor.

As a result, the ERLC is supportive of clear provisions that prohibit the taxpayer-funded misuse of such federal funding to perpetuate harmful gender ideology or “gender transition” procedures. Some examples of these provisions include [language](#) in the House-passed version of the NDAA and [language](#) in the Senate version that restricts the use of taxpayer funding for such procedures.

4. Southern Baptists oppose any expansion of the selective service to include women.



Over the nearly 250 years since its founding, the U.S. government has never required women to register for the draft. On the rare occasions where members of Congress have pushed forward legislation to this effect, both Congress and the courts have met such efforts with resounding rebuke. For example, the Supreme Court recognized in *Rostker v. Goldberg* that Congress has a duty “to focus on the question of military need rather than ‘equity,’” as it applies to selective service.

The Bible and biology clearly dictate this reality: Men and women are different. As demonstrated by the Biden administration’s deliberate Title IX misrepresentation through federal rulemaking, there are inherent differences present as a result of biology that cannot be ignored, regardless of political rhetoric. These unique and intentional differences between men and women are a product of God’s good design.

Southern Baptists remain grateful for the heroic sacrifices of our female service members who selflessly serve to protect our freedoms. Any individual, male or female, willing to brave the challenges of military service deserves our utmost respect and appreciation.

In 2019, Southern Baptists passed a [resolution](#) “oppos[ing] efforts to force women into military service by government coercion” and urging Congress “not to expand the Selective Service to include women, which would be to act against the plain testimony of Scripture and nature.” Congress should maintain existing standards for selective service, such as the language retained in the [House](#)-passed version of the NDAA.

As always, we thank each of you for your commitment to serving the American people and pray that God grants each of you wisdom and discernment as you undertake these negotiations. Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Respectfully,

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