



ADVOCACY ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Top Line: The ERLC employs multiple considerations when determining whether to engage a policy issue. The process involves theological, ethical, historical, and legislative review recognizing our primary obligations to biblical authority, confessional integrity, and the expressed will of the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention.

When deciding when to engage a particular issue, the ERLC considers several factors:

- 1. Is this an issue for which we have a biblical basis to speak?**
- 2. Is this an issue where the *BFM2000* has a clear position?**
- 3. Has the annual meeting of the SBC spoken to this topic, whether through actions on the floor or resolutions?**
- 4. What has been the historic position of the ERLC/CLC since the Conservative Resurgence?**
- 5. Will advocacy on this issue upset certain segments of the SBC? If yes, is it still necessary to take a position/say something?**
- 6. Does our advocacy have a chance to meaningfully advance issues of importance to the Southern Baptist Convention?**
- 7. How will this affect our relationship with non-SBC coalition partners?**

1. Is this an issue for which we have a biblical basis to speak?

The ERLC and its staff affirm without reservation that the Bible “is God’s revelation of Himself to man,” that “it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter,” and that it is “totally true and trustworthy.” It contains the “principles by which God judges us,” and thus is our highest authority.¹ The Bible is straightforwardly clear on many issues (e.g. marriage is between one man and one woman). And even when the Bible does not address every specific issue we encounter (e.g. there are no verses on Artificial Intelligence), it gives enduring principles by which we can evaluate all matters of life (e.g. discussions of human dignity help us evaluate questions of artificial intelligence). Thus, the ERLC will never take a position that contradicts the clear teachings of the Bible.

¹ “I. The Scriptures” in *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#i>.

2. Is this an issue where the *BFM2000* has a clear position?

As the confessional statement of the Southern Baptist Convention, the *BFM2000* represents the convention's consensus regarding the Bible's teaching on the matters it addresses. The ERLC and its staff positively affirm the *BFM2000* and pursue our work within the boundaries of its doctrinal foundations and theological tenets. The ERLC will never take a position contrary to the *BFM2000* and will always strive to embody the tenets contained therein. Where the *BFM* is silent on a specific issue, the ERLC looks to the clearly stated principles of the document to ensure that we are never acting contrary to the spirit of the *BFM*.

3. Has the annual meeting of the SBC spoken to this topic, whether through actions on the floor or resolutions?

Resolutions and actions of the messengers at the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting are timely consensus indicators. Such resolutions or other actions—such as the creation of committees of importance—represent positive affirmation of the will of the messengers. As such, they guide our work.² Even where those actions do not directly bear on the work of the ERLC, they give shape to the way we assist churches in applying the “moral and ethical teachings of the Bible to the Christian life” and provide resources that “equip churches for active moral witness in their communities.”

4. What has been the historic position of the ERLC/CLC since the Conservative Resurgence?

As an institution with a 100+ year history, the ERLC looks to its record of advocacy on issues to determine the long-standing practice and support of the convention for a particular issue. Recognizing that the organization has not always been led by biblical inerrantists, and that during the 1970s the organization tragically advocated for positions inconsistent with biblical principles, the ERLC looks to the administration of Richard Land and later when examining our history.³ As an example of this criteria, the ERLC's current pro-life advocacy falls within a 40+ year history of opposing abortion access, safeguarding the preborn, punishing abortion providers, and supporting mothers.

² As an example, the resolutions on the Uyghur genocide in China shaped ERLC advocacy on this topic as we have opposed the Chinese Communist Party and their religious liberty violations on the international stage. “On Religious Persecution And Human Rights Violations In North Korea And China,” (2019), <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-religious-persecution-and-human-rights-violations-in-north-korea-and-china/>; “On the Uyghur Genocide” (2021), <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-the-uyghur-genocide/>.

³ Though there are moments from prior to Land's election which are laudatory, as in the opposition to gambling and vice in the administration of AJ Barton or the support for *Brown v. Board of Education* under Acker Miller, the ERLC gives special attention to the advocacy occurring after the installation of leaders who affirmed biblical inerrancy.

5. Will advocacy on this issue upset certain segments of the SBC? If yes, is it still necessary to take a position/say something?

The ERLC wishes to speak with the clear support of Southern Baptists, recognizing that Southern Baptists are not in unison on every policy issue or piece of legislation. Thus, when the ERLC considers advocating on behalf of a policy priority, we take seriously the charge that we are to “represent Southern Baptists in communicating the ethical positions of the Southern Baptist Convention to the public and to public officials.”⁴ Where the ERLC believes that advocacy would cause controversy internal to the SBC, it then determines whether that advocacy is necessary based on the criteria above. Where the Bible, *BFM2000*, and the expressed will of the messengers are clear, the ERLC will advocate in light of that authority to advance the policies of import to Southern Baptists.

6. Does our advocacy have a reasonable chance to meaningfully advance issues of importance to the Southern Baptist Convention?

The ERLC works on a wide ranging portfolio, and recognizes that certain key issues are of higher priority to Southern Baptists than others. In light of this, and recognizing that we must deploy resources strategically in order to advance positions of highest importance to Southern Baptists, the ERLC staff regularly determine how likely it is that our advocacy will meaningfully advance those interests. However, we do not determine which issues to support based solely on the potential for success. For example, we will advocate for pro-life legislation at the state and federal level even when it appears unlikely to have an impact. In other cases, there may be little likelihood of success, but we need to be “on the record” regarding an issue of importance to Southern Baptists.

7. How will this affect our relationship with non-SBC coalition partners?

A final consideration that we engage in when deciding when to speak and on which specific issues to advocate is how it will affect our various coalition partners. Following Article 15 of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, the ERLC works with coalitions “in any good cause” “without compromising [our] loyalty to Christ and His truth.” The ERLC frequently works with other groups who align on specific issues that matter deeply to Southern Baptists. The organizations do not fundamentally agree on everything, but work together to advance good policy or advocacy on a case-by-case basis. The impact of our work can be amplified when we partner with like-minded organizations on specific advocacy endeavors. In addition to the considerations above, when we consider taking a public position we also evaluate how it will affect our relationships with our coalition partners. As in all matters, this evaluation takes place in order to ensure we are able to best advance the larger, long-term interests of Southern Baptists.

⁴ “Ministry Statement of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission,” <https://erlc.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ERLC-Ministry-Statement.pdf>.