



November 14, 2025

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
2207 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chairwoman Collins, Vice Chair Murray, and members of the United States House and Senate Appropriations Committees:

I am writing to you as the interim president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Our organization represents the public policy interests of over 46,000 churches and nearly 13 million members through their membership in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

As Southern Baptists, we believe that civil government is ordained by God, that citizens have a duty to obey the governing authorities, and that lawmakers bear the responsibility to pass laws that reflect the moral truths revealed in Scripture and creation and protect the common good (Rom. 13:1-7). Your efforts to solidify annual appropriations bills are a critical component of stewarding this duty. Thank you for your willingness to contend for key provisions, working alongside a new presidential administration to fulfill your obligation to our ever-evolving nation.

On October 1st, government funding lapsed, resulting in a government shutdown and the subsequent halting of federal spending. The ripple effects of this stalemate seeped into far corners of our nation, at great expense to the American people. We are thankful that, on November 12th, lawmakers were able to chart a course forward.

As you now work with your colleagues to finalize federal spending legislation in advance of January 30, we advocate for the retention of provisions concerning life, marriage and family, religious liberty, and human dignity. Current provisions and spending levels – set by the Biden administration – are due for moral and fiscal examination, meaning that it is important that lawmakers prioritize the pursuit of a traditional appropriations process.



Our nation's values are most clearly displayed through our allocation of resources. This remains true for resources secured through annual appropriations spending. It is our desire for those resources to be used in a way that promotes life, religious liberty, and the flourishing of all our neighbors. In light of these principles, we highlight our specific categories of support and concern below. **At the end of this letter, you can find a list of specific items of concern and support.**

Life

At the outset, let me state we are grateful for the hard work exhibited by appropriators and staff in ensuring that longstanding, baseline protections such as the Hyde Amendment were preserved in both the House and Senate appropriations bills. While Hyde and other historical riders provide essential protections for life and conscience, they alone are insufficient to prevent taxpayer dollars from going to causes and organizations that Southern Baptists find morally objectionable.

As Southern Baptists, we affirm the full dignity of every human being and believe that every life is worthy of protection and celebration, beginning with the preborn. We believe life begins at conception and that abortion denies precious preborn human beings of their very lives. The ERLC believes that every person is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-7; Jer. 1:5; Psa. 139:13) and has a right to life – something that should be reflected in the appropriations process..

For over 40 years, Southern Baptists have been outspoken about the reality that abortion is an injustice against both innocent preborn children and vulnerable women in crisis. This issue remains of the highest importance to Southern Baptists, as we desire to see meaningful policies enacted that recognize and prioritize the dignity and value of preborn children. In Fiscal Year 2026 spending bills, we remain opposed to funding predatory organizations, many of which rely on taxpayer dollars, and institutions that exploit vulnerable women for profit.

Flowing out of our commitment to life, Southern Baptists have also expressed [serious concerns](#) with many forms of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), including in vitro fertilization (IVF) as currently practiced. In 2024, Southern Baptists adopted a [resolution](#) entitled *On the Ethical Realities of Reproductive Technology*, addressing this very issue. The fertility industry at large operates in the United States free from baseline regulations, requirements, and reporting standards, with little-to-no protections for parents undergoing the process or for the children created through in vitro fertilization (IVF). In light of those concerns, the ERLC opposes any expansion of taxpayer funding for ARTs. There are provisions that deal directly with this concern in federal appropriations legislation in Fiscal Year 2026, and we urge reconsideration of these ethically fraught measures.



Religious Liberty and Conscience Protections

Reflective of our core Baptist distinctives, the ERLC is committed to religious liberty and conscience protection policies that should accompany it. As articulated in the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, Article XVII, Southern Baptists believe that God alone is Lord of the conscience. Religious freedom is an inalienable human right secured as one of our first freedoms in the Bill of Rights.

Our pro-life ethic compels us to advocate for conscience protections, which are essential not only for protecting healthcare workers from the coercive power of the profit-seeking, on-demand abortion industry, but also for millions of American taxpayers.

With these constitutional and biblical principles as our foundation, we support key provisions in Fiscal Year 2026 funding bills that prohibit undue prosecution based on religious beliefs, oppose antisemitism, and protect healthcare workers from violating their sincerely held convictions. As the ERLC has long maintained, a government that can pave over the conscience has the unlimited ability to eliminate dissent on any issue.

Marriage, Family, and Gender

The ERLC is committed to advocating for a biblical design for marriage, gender, and the family, including opposing harmful gender transition procedures. The societal warping of gender has permeated every corner of public life, resulting in failure to properly steward the God-given institutions of family, marriage, church, government, and community. As [stated](#) in the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, “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.” These statements are not merely Southern Baptist convictions, but universal, biblical, truths that are essential for a healthy, just, and free society.

Additionally, as radical gender ideology has permeated our society and terms such as “sex” have been co-opted to include sexual orientation and gender identity, growing numbers of our fellow citizens have been wrongly convinced that they must pursue harmful, often irreversible surgeries and procedures. As stated in the 2023 SBC [resolution](#) “*On Opposing Gender Transitions*,” Southern Baptists are fundamentally opposed to “gender transition” interventions and regard them as a futile quest to change one’s sex, directly assaulting God’s good design for gender and sexuality. It is unconscionable that government funding would be used to perpetrate this harm.

We support provisions included throughout Fiscal Year 2026 funding bills that affirm these God-given institutions, protecting against discrimination based on a biblical view of marriage and detailing prohibitions on dangerous “gender transitions” through nearly every avenue of government.



Human Dignity

The ERLC is committed to honoring the dignity of every individual, believing that each person is created in the image of God. As a result, we recognize the weighty call on our lives to [respond by](#) “affirm[ing] the sacredness, full dignity, and worthiness of respect and Christian love inherent to every single human being, without any reservation.” To that end, we support the provisions included throughout Fiscal Year 2026 bills that prohibit access to pornographic content, protect unaccompanied minors, and safeguard against child labor practices.

In closing, we remain committed to praying for each of you as you navigate these complex and often weighty budgetary matters. We ask God to multiply your wisdom and discernment in the work ahead.

Respectfully,

Gary Hollingsworth, Ph.D.
Interim President
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
of the Southern Baptist Convention

CC: Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Jeffries, Minority Leader Schumer



ERLC Top Areas of Support and Concern in FY26 Appropriations

Below is a list of priority items for each subcommittee bill.

Agriculture

- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits the use of embryos in research ([Sec. 734](#)) (*Minibus*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits the use of funds to be used to establish new or maintain computer networks unless blocking pornography ([Sec. 713](#)) (*Minibus*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funding from being used to take discriminatory action against a person due to speech or acts related to religious beliefs surrounding the definition of marriage between one man and one woman ([Sec. 780](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Expresses concern regarding marijuana rescheduling ([Bill Report, Page 84](#)) (*House only*)

Commerce, Justice, and Science

- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funding to pay for, facilitate, perform, or require to perform an abortion ([Sec. 202, Sec. 203](#)) (*Both House and Senate*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funds from being used to investigate or prosecute religious institutions on the basis of their religious beliefs ([Sec. 220](#)) (*Both House and Senate*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prevents governments from being sued over single-sex sports, facilities, or limiting transgender medical procedures ([Sec. 576](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prevents funds in this bill from being used to reschedule marijuana ([Sec. 607](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funds used for gender transition procedures and treatments ([Sec. 610](#)) (*House only*)

Department of Defense (War)

- **SUPPORT:** Removes the time limit on cryopreservation of embryos under DoD's IVF policy ([Sec. 8122](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits abortion-related travel and lodging expenses, prohibiting the use of funds for paid leave or travel expenses related to obtaining an abortion ([Sec. 8142](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funds being used for "gender-affirming" care ([Sec. 8145](#)) or for gender transition procedures for minors covered under certain military health plans ([Sec. 8138](#)) (*House only*)

Energy and Water - Senate bill text not yet available

- **SUPPORT:** Blocks the use of funds to maintain or establish computer networks unless the network blocks the viewing, downloading, exchanging of pornography ([Sec. 503](#)) (*House only*)



- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funding from being used to take discriminatory action against a person due to speech or acts related to religious beliefs surrounding the definition of marriage between one man and one woman ([Sec. 506](#)) (*House only*)

Financial Services and General Government - Senate bill text not yet available

- **SUPPORT:** Repeal of DC Death with Dignity Act ([Sec. 819](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Pro-life funding restrictions and instructions for the DC government ([Sec. 726](#), [Sec. 808](#), [Sec. 809](#), [Sec 820](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits coverage of “gender-affirming” care under the Federal Employees Health Benefits program ([Sec. 761](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits use of funds to hire, promote, recruit, or retain anyone who has been convicted of a child pornography charge ([Sec. 755](#)) (*House only*)

Homeland Security - Senate bill text not yet available

- **SUPPORT:** Prohibit ICE funds for abortion-related travel and lodging ([Sec. 222](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits the use of ICE funds for “gender-affirming care” for any person in ICE custody ([Sec. 223](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Report language urging the Department to exhaust all options before pursuing immigration enforcement actions at sensitive locations like houses of worship (Amendment, [Bill Report](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Report language directing DHS to release a report on combatting antisemitism and the implementation of [EO 14188](#) ([Report](#)) (*House only*)

Interior and Environment

- **SUPPORT:** Blocks the use of funds to maintain or establish computer networks unless the network blocks the viewing, downloading, exchanging of pornography ([Sec. 416](#)) (*Both House and Senate*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funding from being used to take discriminatory action against a person due to speech or acts related to religious beliefs surrounding the definition of marriage between one man and one woman. ([Sec. 442](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funding for the promotion of Critical Race Theory ([Sec. 441](#)) (*House only*)
- **CONCERN:** Prohibitions on coverage of “gender affirming” care in the Indian Health Service not included (*Included in FY2025 House bill*)



Labor, HHS, and Education

- **SUPPORT:** Maintained key pro-life riders (*Both House and Senate*)
 - Nickles Amendment ([Sec. 209](#))
 - Hyde Amendment ([Sec. 506](#))
 - Weldon Amendment ([Sec. 507](#))
 - Dickey-Wicker Amendment ([Sec. 508](#))
- **SUPPORT:** Pro-life, pro-family family planning provisions
 - Greenwood Amendment ([Family Planning](#)) (*Senate only*) (**CONCERN: Not included in House**)
 - Specter Amendment ([General Departmental Management](#)) (*Both House and Senate*)
 - Istook Amendment: Title X protections ([Sec. 208](#)) (*Both House and Senate*)
 - Castle Amendment ([Sec. 207](#)) (*Both House and Senate*)
 - [Sexual Risk Avoidance Education, Competitive Grant Program](#) - funding for competitive grants for sexual risk avoidance (defined as voluntarily refraining from non-marital sexual activity) (*Both House and Senate*)
 - Prohibits funding to “prohibited entities,” which provide abortion services ([Sec. 238](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funds for gender-affirming care ([Sec. 244](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits [EO 14076](#), [EO 14079](#), [EO 13988](#) from taking effect ([Sec. 241](#) and [Sec. 243](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits the use of federal funding for hospitals or other entities that offer post-graduate physician or health training if they provide training in the performance, assistance, or referral for abortions if they require such training or discriminate against students that do not wish to receive such training ([Sec. 237](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits the use of funding to conduct or support research using human fetal tissue if such tissue is obtained via an induced abortion ([Sec. 236](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Protections for unaccompanied minors ([Sec. 228](#), [Sec. 231](#), [Sec. 254](#) *in House bill only*, [Sec. 231](#) *in Senate bill only*)

Legislative Branch

- **SUPPORT:** Blocks the use of funds to maintain or establish computer networks unless the network blocks the viewing, downloading, exchanging of pornography ([Sec. 209](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Report language on creating a prayer space for Senate staff and interns ([Senate Report](#)) (*Senate only*)



Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs

- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funding for abortion, abortion counseling, elective abortions, defunding the Biden administration's interim final rule on abortion ([Sec. 255](#)) (*House only*)
- **CONCERN:** The Murray Amendment, on the whole: Allows the Department of Veterans Affairs to use its medical funds for assisted reproductive technologies, including in-vitro fertilization (IVF), for veterans who are rendered infertile by service-connected injuries. ([Sec. 233](#)) (*Minibus*) We are grateful for the following limited pro-life concessions included within the Murray Amendment:
 - (1) allow adoption reimbursement for such veterans;
 - (2) incorporate the Dickey-Wicker Amendment by cross-reference, which bars funds for creating or destroying an embryo in a research context; and
 - (3) bar any time limitations on Federal cost-sharing for the freezing and storage of human embryos.
 - 4) includes adoption reimbursement
- **CONCERN:** Provides funding for gender-specific care with potential to paying for and providing for abortion, including leave and travel related to obtaining the abortion ([Sec. 250](#)) (*Minibus*)

State and Foreign Operations - *Senate bill text not yet available*

- **SUPPORT:** All longstanding pro-life riders (*House only*)
 - Helms Amendment ([Sec 7018](#))
 - Young Amendment ([Peace Corps](#))
 - Biden Amendment ([Sec 7018](#))
 - Siljander Amendment (under [Global Health Programs](#))
 - Kamp-Kasten Amendment (under [Global Health Programs](#))
 - Livingston-Obey Amendment ([under Global Health Programs](#))
 - **(NEW):** No funding for United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), or any NGO that makes a subaward with global health assistance funds to promote or perform abortion ([Sec. 7057](#))
- **CONCERN:** Lautenberg Amendment not included (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits any use of federal dollars that would violate [EO 14187](#), including directly funding or transferring money to an organization that funds, counsels for, promotes, conducts, or subsidizes "gender affirming" care. ([Sec. 7067\(f\)](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Funding for international anti-human trafficking efforts ([Sec. 7060\(d\)](#)), and to prevent violence against women and girls, including child marriage, rape, and female genital cutting and mutilation ([Sec. 7059\(d\)](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** International Religious Freedom Office fully funded at \$50M ([Sec. 7033](#)) (*House only*)



Transportation, Housing, and Rural Development

- **SUPPORT:** Prohibits funding from being used to take discriminatory action against a person due to speech or acts related to religious beliefs surrounding the definition of marriage between one man and one woman. ([Sec. 422](#)) (*House only*)
- **SUPPORT:** Blocks the use of funds to maintain or establish computer networks unless the network blocks the viewing, downloading, exchanging of pornography ([Sec. 414](#)) (*House and Senate*)
- **SUPPORT:** No funds made available may be used in contravention of [EO 14168](#) (Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government) or [EO 14173](#) (Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity) ([Sec. 425](#)) (*House only*)