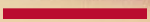




THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

2025

Annual Report



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The Mission of the ERLC

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission exists to assist Southern Baptist churches by helping them understand the moral demands of the gospel, apply Christian principles to moral and social problems and questions of public policy, and to promote religious liberty in cooperation with churches and other Southern Baptist entities.

Gary Hollingsworth

INTERIM PRESIDENT

Dr. Gary Hollingsworth serves as the ERLC’s interim president. A proven organizational leader, he previously served as the executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention from 2016–2023. Prior to that, he also served for a time as senior director of cultural evangelism for the North American Mission Board.

Hollingsworth came to the ERLC with significant pastoral experience, having served as senior pastor at four churches: Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas; First Baptist Church Trussville, Alabama; First Baptist Church Alexandria, Virginia; and Shively Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

Hollingsworth is a graduate of the University of Alabama and holds a M.Div. from Southwestern Seminary and a D.Min. from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Gwen have two sons, one daughter-in-law, and two granddaughters.



“I do believe (Southern Baptists) desperately need the voice and the work of the ERLC. If I can be just a very small part of that and getting it ready for whoever God will bring next, I’m excited about that to see what he will do and how he’ll do it.”

- DR. GARY HOLLINGSWORTH

Letter from the Interim President

DEAR SOUTHERN BAPTISTS,

In 2 Chronicles 19, we discover King Jehoshaphat trying to do the right thing by bringing spiritual reform to Judah. Yet, on the heels of this, he faced a massive coalition army of Moabites and Ammonites coming against him. What does he do in the midst of such turmoil? He “feared and set himself to seek the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:3). Furthermore, he gathered the people together to seek the Lord alongside him and prayed: “We have no power against the great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do *but our eyes are upon you*” (2 Chron. 20:12).

We find ourselves in a comparable situation as Southern Baptists in the midst of such a complex, secular culture. In particular, as an SBC entity, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission has faced its share of turmoil over the last few years, even in the midst of effective work in the public square on issues that matter to Southern Baptists.

In September, I had the privilege of being elected as interim president of this important Commission, with my service beginning on Oct. 1. On a human level, this is uncharted territory for me, but it is a task which I am honored to take on because I believe the SBC needs the ministry of the ERLC.

From abortion battles at the state level, to questions of artificial intelligence, to gender confusion that has permeated our cultural ethos, the ERLC stands ready to equip our churches and advocate for Southern Baptist convictions in the areas of life, religious liberty, marriage & family, and human dignity.

We carry out our ministry so that you can carry out yours—bringing the truth of God’s Word and the hope of the gospel to the people you faithfully serve.

During my personal devotional time, I read a quote from Chuck Swindoll that stuck with me. He said, “We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.” You and I might feel like we are in impossible situations. By human effort alone, no institution will last, no government can be transformed, no community will be changed, no convention can be unified, and no heart can be saved. But we know and serve the God with whom all things are possible (Matt. 19:26). We, at the ERLC, are eager to serve him alongside you as we watch him do the impossible.

In his service,



DR. GARY HOLLINGSWORTH

INTERIM PRESIDENT, THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS COMMISSION



▲ A group of SBC pastors joined the ERLC in D.C. to make our voices heard in the public square.

Policy

OVER THE ERLC'S PAST FISCAL year, our policy team in Washington, D.C., has tenaciously advocated alongside Southern Baptists on issues of great significance and importance to our Convention: life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity. We have achieved numerous public policy victories that matter to Southern Baptist churches. This year, we prioritized church and pas-

tor engagement, mindful that while the ERLC is an entity that advocates in the public square, it is our church-facing work that provides the foundation on which we can build all other efforts.

In this season of our advocacy, our nation has seen the end of a federal fiscal year, numerous abortion ballot initiatives, a consequential presidential election, and the consideration of

special legislative vehicles to address spending priorities of the new administration. Nearly every part of the political landscape has changed within the last year, necessitating a policy team that is both adaptable and proactive while remaining anchored to our ministry assignment. Similarly, the policy team strives to reflect the consensus views of the SBC, faithful to Scripture, grounded in the *Baptist*

Faith & Message, and responsive to the will of the messengers in applying Christian principles to public policy questions in real time.

In spring of 2025, Katy Roberts joined the Leland House team as policy manager and was quickly promoted to senior policy manager. Katy joins us after spending a number of years on Capitol Hill, working in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Katy graduated from Texas A&M University with a business degree and later received a masters in healthcare policy from Georgetown University. She is currently pursuing her M.A. in Ethics, Theology, and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Since Katy joined Leland House, the policy team's engagement on Capitol Hill, with the Trump administration, and with coalition partners has significantly deepened and expanded. In the short time that Tim, Sarah, and Katy have worked together, they have displayed remarkable collaboration and demonstrated their shared commitment to carrying out the mission and ministry assignment of the ERLC in Washington.

Executive Summary

Several things cut across all four lanes of our work: appropriations,

the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), court cases, and budget reconciliation, all of which are expanded on below.

In 2024, the ERLC conducted our annual [comprehensive review](#) of all 24 appropriations bills, which entails carefully analyzing thousands of pages of funding bills to ensure taxpayer money is not being directed to services, organizations, or projects

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that Southern Baptists find morally objectionable. This review fuels our advocacy and provides members of Congress and their staff with a detailed summary of Southern Baptist priorities and concerns regarding their tax dollars. Since so few advocacy organizations engage in such an arduous assessment, our work proves as a helpful and comprehensive resource for congressional offices. As a result, numerous Southern Baptist priorities were [included](#) in congressional spending bills in Fiscal Year 2025.

This summer, ERLC staff began advocacy efforts for government funding provisions for Fiscal Year 2026. The ERLC conducted the same annual [comprehensive review](#) of Fiscal Year 2026 bills, sharing a letter with lawmakers detailing the priorities of Southern Baptists. On October 1st, government funding lapsed, resulting in a government shutdown and the subsequent halting of federal spending. We are thankful that, on November 12th, lawmakers were able to chart a course forward. Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations funding is still being debated in advance of the extended deadline of January 30, 2026.

Additionally, the policy team engaged with committee staff to advocate for certain provisions in the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act ([NDAA](#)), a bill passed annually that authorizes the federal government to spend money on defense. The ERLC engages with this legislation because the Department of Defense (DoD) houses an entire ecosystem of sub-departments, including a separate health insurance program and education department, making DoD a "testing ground" and precedent-setting agency for social policy initiatives. The ERLC's advocacy on several FY2025 NDAA [priorities](#) resulted in massive wins for



▲ TOP: Congressman Scott Franklin meets with a group of SBC pastors hosted by the ERLC; BOTTOM: Sen. Lankford talks to a group of SBC pastors hosted by the ERLC.

Southern Baptists. The ERLC [advocated](#) for similar priorities in the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, which is still being considered by Congress.

Across the nation, voters in 10 states considered abortion ballot measures last year. In response, the ERLC launched an [abortion ballot initiative](#) campaign to equip our state conventions, pastors, and church members with informational resources aimed to help defeat these ballot measures. We saw several wins for life, as three pro-abortion ballot initiatives were defeated, and the first pro-life ballot measure passed in Nebraska.

November of 2024 brought a contentious election that delivered President Trump a second term in office. As a result, both chambers of

federal funding does not go toward abortion and the reversal of the Biden administration’s anti-religious liberty, pro-gender ideology rulemaking.

Since Trump’s inauguration and the start of the 119th Congress, Capitol Hill has been brimming with activity. Congress has sought to prioritize three main things:

- to further Trump’s agenda while reversing Biden-era policy,
- to make progress on annual appropriations bills,
- and to pass budget reconciliation legislation.

So, too, our team has prioritized these three items in congressional meetings, engaging with over 50 member offices since the start of the calendar year.

giant of more than \$700 million in annual taxpayer funding. This is the first time abortion providers have been barred from receiving federal payments in permanent law, marking a historic pro-life achievement. The ERLC worked with a small group of trusted pro-life coalition partners on a weekly basis to discuss how to advance the defund provision through the budget reconciliation process. A coordinated strategy came out of these meetings for engagement with the legislative branch in order to ensure that large abortion providers are no longer able to receive federal funding. This goal was achieved on July 4th, though its implementation has been stalled by expected legal challenges.

As spring arrived, the Supreme Court began releasing long-awaited decisions on the five cases the ERLC [engaged](#) this term. In each case, our team swiftly reviewed the decision and produced resources to assist Southern Baptists in understanding the importance of the outcome. The cases this term ranged on issues from the sanctity of life, protecting religious liberty, and championing God’s good design for marriage and family. The ERLC saw wins in all five of these cases.

A hallmark of this spring was our pastor advocacy trips. Under the Leatherwood administration, the ERLC increasingly aimed to serve as a distinctively Baptist voice, from SBC pastors and congregations, in the public square. The ERLC has publicly committed to better resourcing

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Congress and the White House are now led by Republicans, referred to as a “trifecta.” After Trump’s victory on election night, the ERLC sent his transition team a [letter](#) outlining five priorities for his first 100 days in office, of which four have been completed thus far. These include several pro-life policies that would ensure

Early in 2025, the ERLC published a list of [pro-life and pro-family](#) policies that lawmakers should prioritize in the final reconciliation bill. Four of those priorities were successfully included in the final bill—most significantly, [defunding large abortion providers like Planned Parenthood](#) for one year, stripping the big abortion

churches, prioritizing church engagement, and investing in research. Pastor advocacy trips are an outflow of this commitment. In response to the Convention's desire to know more about our efforts in the nation's capitol, we sought to answer questions by inviting pastors and lay leaders to come to Washington and partake in our work. Not only that, but bringing these pastors to Washington to advocate on behalf of their churches only strengthened our efforts on Capitol Hill and with the administration. Out of these trips, pastors [affirmed](#) the impact of the ERLC in Washington, leaving with a greater understanding of how their public policy entity advocates alongside Southern Baptists in the public square.

Policy Priorities Summarized: State and Federal Policy Agendas

Each year, the policy team creates the ERLC's Public Policy Agenda, a comprehensive resource that communicates our federal advocacy priorities for the upcoming year. The [2025 agenda](#) includes over 40 items that ERLC staff have been raising with partners and lawmakers to advance hopeful, gospel-centered federal policy provisions.

In 2025, the ERLC also published its second edition of the annual [State Policy Agenda](#), which serves as a resource for legislators, Baptist state conventions, and Southern Baptists by highlighting state-level policy initiatives that reflect the cultural and

ethical priorities of Southern Baptists. The highlighted legislation is not an exhaustive evaluation of policies considered by state legislatures, but a compilation of bills brought to the ERLC's attention by Southern Baptist state ethics leaders, state conventions, and other partners who share our values. ERLC policy staff engage on state policy issues solely at the invitation of Baptist state conventions. This year, the ERLC

engaged on a number of [important legislative outcomes](#).

These two resources aim to represent the moral and ethical consensus of Southern Baptists in the form of policy priorities related to life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity.

Life

Over the past fiscal year, our work on behalf of preborn lives has centered



▲ The 2025 Public Policy Agenda focuses on federal legislation the ERLC is watching and actively engaging.

on advancing protections for life through strategic engagement in the appropriations process, reconciliation efforts, ethical responses to in vitro fertilization (IVF), and sustained federal advocacy.

Appropriations and NDAA

During the 2021 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers unanimously supported a [resolution](#) condemning attempts to remove the [Hyde Amendment](#), a longstanding appropriations provision that ensures taxpayer dollars do not fund abortion and calling on Congress to uphold all pro-life appropriations riders. Since that time, the “Hyde-family” of riders has become even more essential to include in annual spending legislation after witnessing the ways in which the Biden administration sought to circumvent and exploit these provisions. These pro-life protections and prohibitions of funding have to be passed anew each year.

Pre-election sentiments on Capitol Hill caused delays in passing FY2025 appropriations bills, subsequently stalling the consideration of FY2026 appropriations bills. The ERLC remained vocal in both sets of negotiations, advocating to retain and expand existing pro-life provisions and conscience protections. The policy team provided a comprehensive [section-by-section review](#) for FY2025 provisions, outlining areas of support and opposition found in all 24 bills.

The fiscal year ended in March of 2025 with the passage of a continuing resolution, finally allowing for consideration of FY2026 bills.

While proposed FY2026 bills are still being released and debated ahead of the new January 30 deadline, our team is proactively advocating for the vulnerable and the preborn. In addition to our November comprehensive advocacy [letter](#), the ERLC sent a [letter](#) in June to top lawmakers, outlining our top requests specifically related to the protection of life.

Additionally, we engaged with committee staff to advocate for certain provisions in the FY2025 [NDAA](#),

to address many of these same priorities again in the FY2026 process. On Dec. 18, President Trump signed the FY2026 NDAA into law. The final bill included pro-life protections and did not include language providing expanded coverage for IVF. Both are pro-life wins for the ERLC.

Administration

After President Trump’s victory in November, the ERLC sent the presidential transition team a letter outlining five priorities for his first 100 days in office. The ERLC has been pleased to see that Trump has decisively taken action on [four of these priorities](#).

Our work on behalf of preborn lives has centered on advancing protections for life through strategic engagement in the appropriations process, reconciliation efforts, ethical responses to in vitro fertilization (IVF), and sustained federal advocacy.

an annually passed bill that authorizes the federal government to spend money on defense. The ERLC’s [advocacy](#) in these negotiations resulted in the removal of language that would permit taxpayer-funded expansion of IVF. The ERLC engaged with House and Senate Armed Services Committee staff and congressional leadership

In [Enforcing the Hyde Amendment](#), Trump makes clear that American taxpayers should not be forced to pay for the practice or promotion of elective abortion. This executive order also rescinded Biden-era executive actions that would further access to abortion. Additionally, Trump [directed](#) Secretary Rubio to reinstate the Protecting

Life in Global Health Assistance Policy, previously called the “Mexico City Policy,” ensuring that international entities that receive U.S. government funding cannot perform or counsel for abortions abroad. Domestically, Trump froze funding for Title X family planning grantees in April, signaling that this administration is seriously evaluating each grantee to determine their efficacy as well as their compliance with federal law.

While we are encouraged by this progress, the ERLC continues to advocate for the completion of the fifth priority: restoring critical Food and Drug Administration safety and risk mitigation framework for chemical abortion pills. Ultimately, we are working to prohibit the use of this harmful and life-taking drug. As part of our ongoing efforts, the ERLC joined coalition letters [urging the regulation](#) of chemical abortion drugs and [calling for restrictions](#) on the mailing of mifepristone. We remain committed to engaging the administration on this final priority, which is essential to ensuring long-term protections for preborn lives and preserving the conscience rights of taxpayers. This advocacy directly serves our churches and reflects the convictions expressed in the resolution overwhelmingly adopted by messengers at the 2025 SBC Annual Meeting, “[On Standing Against the Moral Evils and Medical Dangers of Chemical Abortion Pills](#).”

Finally, in September 2025, the ERLC filed [public comments](#) to end

a Biden-era rule requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to include healthcare coverage for abortion. Under this rule, VA medical providers could counsel women toward abortion at any stage in their pregnancy, functionally promoting abortion

Court to uphold South Carolina’s decision to exclude Planned Parenthood from its state Medicaid program. Our brief reflected Southern Baptists’ longstanding conviction that taxpayer funds should not be used to subsidize abortion providers, even indirectly.

The ERLC ensured the voices of Southern Baptists were heard before the court, reinforcing our commitment to defend life, support the autonomy of states to enact pro-life policy, and steward public funds in ways that align with our biblical convictions.

on-demand. Thankfully, the Trump administration has issued a [proposed rule](#) that would return to the correct legal interpretation of the VA’s prohibition on abortion coverage. In the comments, the ERLC cited Southern Baptist moral stances, highlighted legal concerns with the Biden rule, and ultimately, welcomed Trump’s corrective proposal to restore VA health plans to respecting the dignity of human life and the consciences of American taxpayers.

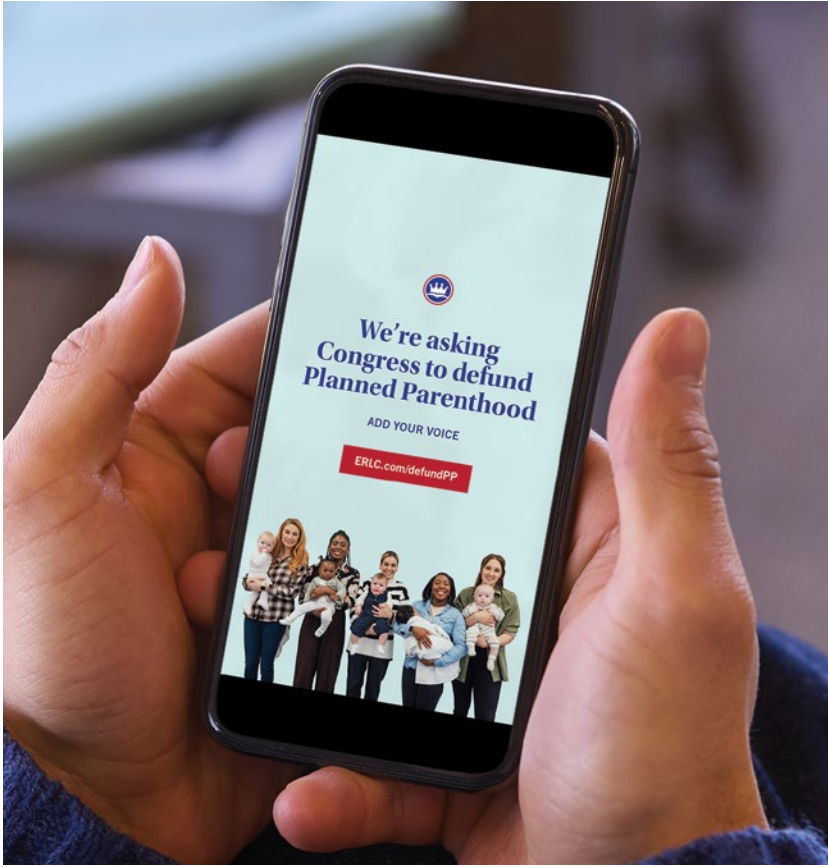
Supreme Court

In *Medina v. Planned Parenthood South Atlantic*, the ERLC continued its pro-life legal advocacy by filing an [amicus brief](#) urging the Supreme

The court’s 6–3 decision was a significant victory, affirming the right of states to determine which providers qualify for Medicaid reimbursement. Through this case, the ERLC ensured the voices of Southern Baptists were heard before the court, reinforcing our commitment to defend life, support the autonomy of states to enact pro-life policy, and steward public funds in ways that align with our biblical convictions.

Defunding Planned Parenthood

The Republican trifecta ushered in by Trump’s election paved the way for federal lawmakers to use a key legislative tool known as “[reconciliation](#)” this Congress, enabling sweeping tax



and budget reforms while lowering the Senate vote threshold to a simple majority. This tool allowed for the passage of key [pro-life and pro-family](#) provisions in federal tax and budget law. In January, the ERLC published a list of pro-life and pro-family policies that lawmakers should prioritize in reconciliation. Four of those priorities were successfully included in the final July 4th reconciliation bill—most significantly, the bill fully [defunded Planned Parenthood](#) for one year, stripping the abortion giant of more than \$700 million in annual taxpayer funding. The ERLC actively met with lawmakers and their staff, delivering a [letter](#) representing Southern Baptists nationwide

and advocating for these priorities on their behalf. As a pivotal part of these efforts, the policy team [brought](#) cohorts of Southern Baptist pastors to Washington to advocate alongside us for the defunding of Planned Parenthood, demonstrating our commitment to work with the churches we serve and represent Southern Baptists with clarity and conviction.

In addition to these direct advocacy efforts, the ERLC wrote a [letter](#) to the House Energy and Commerce Committee urging the full defunding of Planned Parenthood, led a [letter](#) with the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention amplifying the voice of local churches on this issue

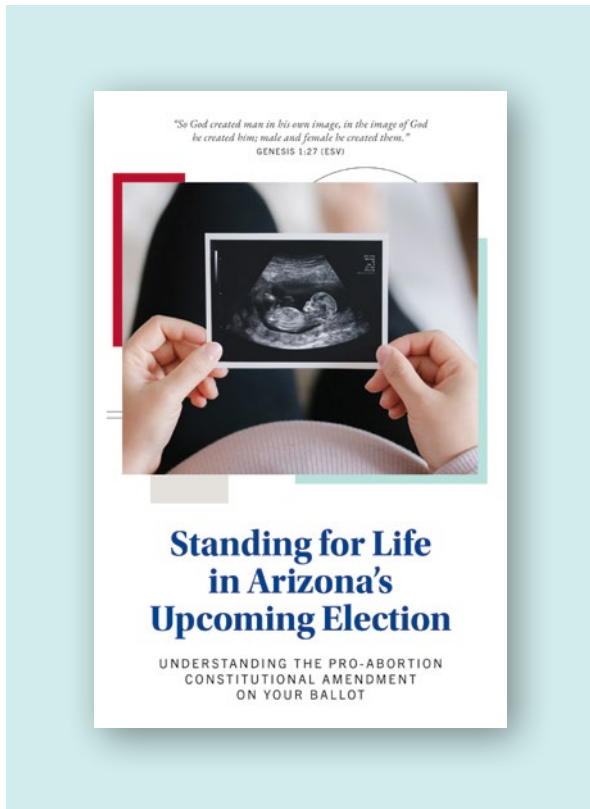
◀ The reconciliation process in 2025 presented an opportunity for Planned Parenthood to be defunded.

to Sen. Crapo, and joined a broad coalition [letter](#) with Advancing American Freedom. By taking these steps, we strengthened the unified pro-life witness of Southern Baptists, fortified coalition partnerships, and ensured our churches were faithfully represented before Congress and the administration.

IVF

Southern Baptists continue to be the leading evangelical body calling for consideration of the ethical dimensions of IVF from a biblical worldview. In light of the [Alabama Supreme Court ruling](#) and lawmakers' growing interest in IVF policymaking, the ERLC has aimed to create beneficial resources for Southern Baptists and members of Congress alike.

The ERLC has produced [IVF policy recommendations](#), actively engaged in coalition meetings, advocated directly with Capitol Hill staff, and met with the Trump administration to [oppose measures](#) that would expand taxpayer funding for IVF, extend coverage to same-sex couples, or prevent future regulation of the IVF industry. We are grateful that this policy area has also garnered significant attention within our churches, with Southern Baptists reaffirming their commitment at the 2024 Annual Meeting through the resolution "[On the Ethical Relations](#)



▲ LEFT: The ERLC assisted various state conventions in advocating for life during the November 2024 election season; RIGHT: The ERLC team joined thousands in marching for life in 2025.

of Technologies and the Dignity of the Human Embryo.” This resolution calls on believers to advocate for government action that upholds the dignity and value of every human being—including frozen embryonic human beings. These efforts demonstrate our ongoing work to help churches engage faithfully in the public square on complex bioethical issues while ensuring that the voices of Southern Baptists are clearly represented in Washington.

Abortion Ballot Initiatives

Across the nation, voters in several states considered [abortion ballot](#)

[measures](#) in the 2024 election. In response, the ERLC launched a campaign in partnership with state conventions to equip pastors and church members with resources to help defeat these initiatives. This effort contributed to several pro-life wins, including the defeat of three pro-abortion ballot measures and the passage of the first pro-life ballot initiative protecting preborn life in Nebraska. While we celebrate these victories, we also must lament the seven losses for the pro-life cause that drastically expanded abortion in those states. This underscores Southern Baptists’ ongoing work of engaging

culture in hopes of changing the hearts and minds of people to recognize the inherent value of preborn life. The ERLC’s role in these state elections is more critical than ever in advocating for the long-term protection of preborn life. The ERLC spoke to this need for a cultural shift in a summer first-person [article](#).

Events and Legislative Advocacy

In January, our team participated in the annual March for Life. In conjunction with the March, the House of Representatives passed the [Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act](#), a bill that requires healthcare

providers to provide care to babies that survive failed abortions. Unfortunately, pro-abortion lawmakers held up the bill in the Senate after it failed to receive the 60 votes required. Due to our active support for the legislation, our team participated in the press conference hosted by Sen. Lankford, the bill's leading Senate sponsor.

The policy team continues to partner with Capitol Hill staff in policymaking, working to provide legislative text recommendations and endorsing over 20 bills within the last year in alignment with the consensus of Southern Baptists. Critically important, much of this work happens behind the scenes.

Religious Liberty

Over the last year, our team has been working to promote protections for free religious exercise, conscience rights, and persecuted people domestically and abroad, representing the Southern Baptist conviction that a free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.

Domestic

Defending the religious freedom of all people remains a foundational focus of the ERLC's work in Washington. A continued priority this past year has been to oppose legislative efforts to weaken or carve out exceptions to key protections found in the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). RFRA has long served as one of the most important legislative

safeguards for the Church and for individuals seeking to live out their faith in the public square. Whether in healthcare mandates or defense policy, proposed exemptions are deeply troubling and threaten the religious freedom of everyone. The ERLC continues to actively oppose such carveouts and is working to ensure that no legislation—[federal](#) or [state](#)—undermines RFRA's foundational protections.

In keeping with that commitment, we have continued to advocate for religious liberty protections in the annual [NDAA](#), ensuring that conscience protections and the freedom to live out one's faith are [preserved](#) for those serving in the military.

[Program](#)" and in 1985, "[On Deductibility of Charitable Contributions.](#)"

The ERLC was proud to advocate for this provision and [celebrated](#) its inclusion in the final legislation. The policy team engaged with congressional offices and signed a joint [letter](#) urging lawmakers to include this provision in the bill. For the first time, all taxpayers, including non-itemizers, can now deduct charitable contributions: up to \$1,000 for individuals and \$2,000 for married couples. This change will encourage greater generosity toward faith-based ministries and local churches, strengthen civil society, and promote giving to communities in need.

Our team has been working to promote protections for free religious exercise, conscience rights, and persecuted people domestically and abroad, representing the Southern Baptist conviction that a free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.

One encouraging development was the inclusion of a universal charitable deduction in this summer's [reconciliation package](#)—a Southern Baptist priority for many years. At the 2013 Annual Meeting, Southern Baptists passed a resolution "[On Tithing, Stewardship, and the Cooperative](#)

Lastly, the ERLC signed a [letter](#) in [support](#) of the Equal Campus Access Act of 2025, introduced by Sen. Lankford and Rep. Walberg. This bill affirms the freedom of all students to meet on public college campuses based on their shared religious beliefs. Specifically, it would prevent funds

given under the Higher Education Act from going to schools that discriminate against religious student groups by denying them access to facilities otherwise available to them. As [people](#) who believe in religious liberty, it is essential students are conferred this same protection at public institutions of higher learning, something that has been denied them on several campuses in the past.

International Advocacy

The ERLC’s international advocacy work sometimes gets overlooked, but we continue to weigh in on matters of international concern to Southern Baptists. Southern Baptists have consistently voiced their support for the persecuted Church and advocated for religious freedom across the globe so that more people can hear the gospel and come to know Christ.

On Oct. 7, 2024, the ERLC partnered with SBC President Clint Pressley to send several [letters](#) to Congress and the administration, urging continued support for Israel and advocating for the release of Israeli hostages. The ERLC sent an additional [letter](#) communicating this aim to the United Nations. Recently, we have seen several of these hostages returned to their families. Southern Baptists have strongly supported the people and nation of Israel throughout the decades and have continually condemned Hamas for its terrorist attacks bent on genocide.

Aligned with Southern Baptist values, the ERLC also sent a [letter](#) to the

Department of State advocating for roughly 300 adopted children to be released from China to their adoptive families in the U.S., several of whom are Southern Baptists. Unfortunately, to date, China continues to restrict international adoptions, devastating these families that were so close to welcoming their children home. We continue to hope that the new administration might have greater success in moving this priority forward.

In April 2025, the ERLC sent a [letter](#) to Secretary of State Rubio urging the designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) due to its ongoing and severe persecution of Christians and other religious minorities. The letter called on the administration to take immediate action in response to escalating violence. Through these efforts, the ERLC ensured that the voices of Southern Baptists were represented before the Trump administration and continued to condemn violence and heinous attacks against those expressing their faith. Later in the year, as targeted attacks ramped up in the West African nation, the Trump administration designated Nigeria as a CPC—a priority [long held](#) by the ERLC on behalf of Southern Baptists.

In June 2025, the ERLC’s policy team began targeted advocacy to support the confirmation of Ambassador-designate Mark Walker, a fellow Southern Baptist, as ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom at the Department of State. We sent an independent [letter](#)

to Chairman Risch of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urging a timely confirmation process, highlighting Walker’s experience as both a former pastor and member of Congress. In addition to our own letter, we joined a broader coalition effort with the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable to reinforce the urgent need for strong leadership in this vital role. Later, we joined the IRF Roundtable in sending a coalition letter to Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Shaheen, continuing to highlight the need for Walker’s swift confirmation.

This advocacy reflects the resolution, “[On Advocating for International Religious Freedom](#),” adopted by messengers at the 2025 SBC Annual Meeting, which reaffirmed Southern Baptists’ commitment to defending international religious liberty. Through these efforts, the ERLC ensured that Southern Baptists were represented in the ongoing work to defend religious liberty around the world and to promote this fundamental right as a key priority of U.S. foreign policy.

Courts

Building upon strong religious liberty case law again this term, the Supreme Court handed down two significant victories for our First Amendment rights. In [Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission](#), the justices ruled unanimously that the Wisconsin Supreme Court erroneously

created a judicial test to discriminate against Catholic Charities Bureau for not being religious enough to receive a religious tax exemption, despite being controlled by the Diocese of Superior. The ERLC advocated alongside other faith groups in a [brief](#) supporting Catholic Charities.

On the last day of the term, the justices handed down a 6–3 decision in *Mabmoud v. Taylor*, a case from Montgomery County, Maryland, wherein school board officials removed opt-outs for controversial gender ideology instruction for elementary school children. The Supreme Court agreed with Montgomery County parents that the instruction burdened their religious exercise and that the schools are required to provide notice and opt-out opportunities. The ERLC filed an October 2024 [brief](#) before the court urging them to take the case and [another](#) in March 2025, alongside other faith groups, arguing for the parents.

Marriage & Family

In his kindness, God created the institution of marriage, the blessing of children, the foundation of family, and the goodness of our gender. As our culture rejects and degrades these foundational and God-designed elements of human life, our policy team is working to promote strong families, assist adoptive and foster families, and restore biblical truth and biological reality to our cultural understanding of gender and sexuality.

Administration

As the second Trump administration began, the ERLC was pleased to see the White House issue a number of executive orders (EOs) ending the radical gender ideology agenda of the previous administration. These EOs are consistent with the ERLC’s [third and fourth priorities](#) sent to the president’s transition team on removing the problematic actions of the Biden administration. In [Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism And Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government](#), the

Congress

Consistent with Trump’s executive orders on gender ideology, Congress voted on the Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act, a bill to clarify that it is a violation of Title IX to allow biological males to compete in women’s sports. The ERLC widely circulated our [endorsement](#) of this bill to House and Senate offices prior to the vote. While the bill stalled in the Senate, there still remain opportunities for Congress to pass this legislation and restore common sense to our athletic competitions.

Our policy team is working to promote strong families, assist adoptive and foster families, and restore biblical truth and biological reality to our cultural understanding of gender and sexuality.

Trump administration made clear, “It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality.” On Feb. 5, Trump signed [Keeping Men Out of Women’s Sports](#), stating, “It shall also be the policy of the United States to oppose male competitive participation in women’s sports more broadly, as a matter of safety, fairness, dignity, and truth.”

Alongside our other FY25 NDAA priorities, the ERLC [urged](#) Congress through Hill engagement to prevent healthcare coverage of “gender transition” drugs and procedures for service members and their families. Additionally, the Senate included a provision that would have required women to register for the selective service, which the ERLC [adamantly opposed](#). Passed in December, the FY25 NDAA removed the provision on women in the selective service

and included the first federal prohibition on taxpayer funding for “gender transition” in any capacity for children. We have already begun our advocacy for the FY26 NDAA. With anticipated final votes coming at the end of this year, the ERLC has been engaging with House and Senate Armed Services Committee staff and congressional leadership to address many of these same priorities again.

The reconciliation process provided the opportunity to pass significant tax reforms that promoted the well-being of families across the country. One such provision is the [Child Tax Credit](#) (CTC), which Trump increased to \$2,000 in 2017. The increase was set to expire in 2025, meaning a significant tax hike on roughly 40 million families. Furthermore, \$500 of the credit was lost because of inflation, meaning families were not receiving the full benefits intended by the credit. In the end, the ERLC successfully advocated for the CTC to be increased to \$2,200 and permanently indexed to inflation so families continue to receive the benefits intended from this credit. Similarly, the ERLC, alongside [Congressman Robert Aderholt](#) (R-AL-04), advocated for the inclusion of a refundable adoption tax credit for families wanting to provide a permanent, loving home to a child needing a home. The ERLC endorsed Congressman Aderholt’s [letter](#) to the Ways and Means Committee encouraging them to include

the provision as a priority in the reconciliation bill. The final bill included a \$5,000 refundable credit for adopting families to help them in this expensive process. Throughout the spring, the ERLC [brought](#) cohorts of Southern Baptist pastors to Washington to advocate alongside us for these two pro-family provisions.

Supreme Court

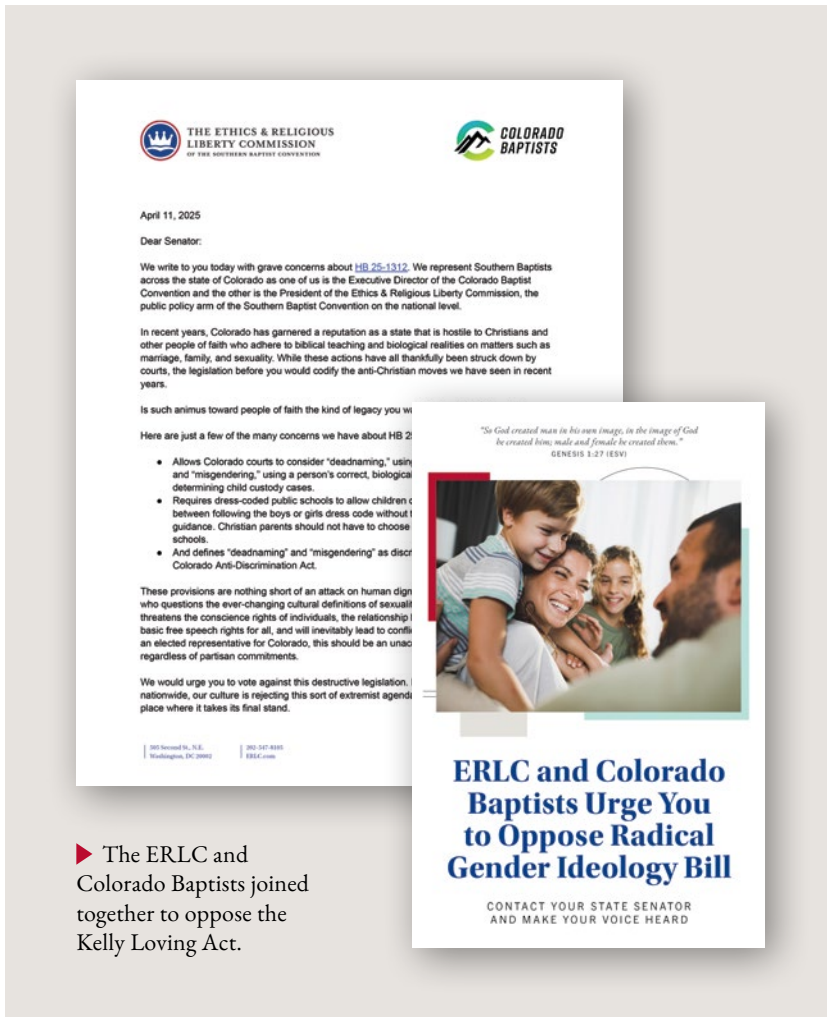
One of the most high-profile cases before the Supreme Court this term was *U.S. v. Skrametti*, a lawsuit centered on Tennessee’s prohibition of “gender transition” drugs and procedures for minors. In a [6–3 victory](#) authored by Chief Justice Roberts, the court held that Tennessee’s law

The messengers to the 2025 Annual Meeting approved a resolution “On Banning Pornography,” authored by Brent Leatherwood, containing language in support of age-verification laws.

Another key legislative priority of the ERLC has been the [SCREEN Act](#) sponsored by Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT), which would require pornographic websites to implement age-verification laws to prevent children from accessing this harmful content. The messengers to the 2025 Annual Meeting approved a resolution “[On Banning Pornography](#),” based on a resolution submitted by Brent Leatherwood, who served as ERLC president at the time, containing language in support of age-verification laws. Recognizing the physical, mental, and spiritual harms that come from pornography, the SCREEN Act offers a needed remedy to protect children and promote their flourishing.

did not violate the Equal Protection Clause or constitute sex discrimination. Instead, the law regulated these drugs and procedures based on age and medical purpose. The ERLC partnered with the [Tennessee Baptist Mission Board](#) in laying out these arguments to the Supreme Court in October 2024.

Another important case the court considered was *Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton*. Here, in a [6–3 decision](#), the court ruled that Texas’s age-verification law for pornographic websites does not need to be reviewed under strict scrutiny and satisfies intermediate scrutiny. Authored by Justice Thomas, the court’s ruling permits the 24 states with similar laws to



► The ERLC and Colorado Baptists joined together to oppose the Kelly Loving Act.

continue protecting children from the dangers of online pornographic content. The ERLC filed an [amicus brief](#) to the Supreme Court joined by both the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) and the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT).

State Advocacy

Earlier this year, Colorado made headlines for considering a controversial and harmful bill, named the “Kelly Loving Act,” centered on stripping away free speech protections

for those who hold biblical views of gender and sexuality and using such convictions as justification to drive a wedge between parents and their children. Colorado Baptists requested assistance from the ERLC, and our team quickly drafted a [letter](#) to the Colorado Senate and designed [church bulletin inserts](#) educating pastors and congregations about the bill and how they could oppose it. With significant amendments in the Senate, the bill passed, prompting the ERLC and Colorado Baptist

Executive Director Mike Proud to send another [letter](#) to Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, urging him to veto the legislation. While the bill was signed into law, the ERLC is already monitoring [litigation](#) from a clothing apparel store arguing that the state requiring “preferred pronoun” usage violates their freedom of speech.

International Advocacy

Aligned with Southern Baptist values, the ERLC also sent a [letter](#) to the Department of State advocating for roughly 300 adopted children to be released from China to their adoptive families in the U.S., several of whom are Southern Baptist. Unfortunately, to date, China continues to restrict international adoptions, devastating these families that were so close to welcoming their children home.

In addition to our advocacy for vulnerable children, the ERLC joined a [letter](#) in April urging the Trump administration to condition any peace deal between Russia and Ukraine on the return of the over [20,000 Ukrainian children](#) that have been abducted and re-homed to Russia. Furthermore, the ERLC met with the Trump administration’s Special Envoy for Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, to discuss the plight of these children.

Human Dignity

Summarizing the clear teaching of Scripture, the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000* accurately explains that as all people bear the image of God,

“every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.” With this understanding, the ERLC has worked toward policy solutions that recognize and uphold the dignity of every person aligned with the priorities of Southern Baptist messengers.

Artificial Intelligence

As our society begins to grapple with the effects of artificial intelligence and technological advancements, Southern Baptists find it necessary to ensure these technologies are not used in ways that undermine the dignity and worth of humans. The ERLC was [pleased](#) to see Congress bipartisanly pass the Take It Down Act, a law that criminalizes deepfake pornography, including AI-generated images, and requires websites to remove the images within 48 hours. This is a strong step toward preventing online sexual exploitation through AI.

Additionally, in response to President Trump’s AI Action Plan, the ERLC issued a [policy explainer](#) as a resource for Southern Baptist pastors and churches. As conversations about ethical AI engagement increase, the ERLC continues to engage lawmakers about the complex opportunities and challenges AI poses for the church and for society as a whole.

Immigration

At the beginning of Trump’s second term, the ERLC sent a [letter](#) urging his administration to prioritize

religious freedom principles in their immigration enforcement, emphasizing the need for churches to serve their communities well.

In June, the ERLC endorsed the Religious Workforce Protection Act (RWPA) and joined a [letter](#) sent to every member of Congress. This bill would remedy a 21-year backlog in the employment-based 4th category green card (EB-4), impacting religious workers here on an R-1 visa.

The R-1 visa requires workers to return to their country for a minimum of one year before returning on a subsequent R-1 visa, separating them from the congregations they serve. The RWPA would allow R-1 religious workers with a pending EB-4 application to stay in the country until a determination on their green card is made. The ERLC has heard from several SBC churches and pastors that their congregations are at risk of losing pastors or other ministry workers here on an R-1 visa. In May, the ERLC [brought Southern Baptist ethnic fellowship leaders](#) to Washington to engage federal lawmakers on this issue.

In September, the ERLC disaffiliated with the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT). In recent years, our coalition work with EIT resulted in controversy that did not serve EIT, the ERLC, or our Southern Baptist churches well. Thus, the ERLC executive leadership team made the decision to [leave](#) this coalition. To best serve our churches, the ERLC will take a more independent posture to our immigration-related work.

The ERLC has worked toward policy solutions that recognize and uphold the dignity of every person aligned with the priorities of Southern Baptist messengers.

For over two decades, immigration policy has been a priority for the ERLC because immigration policy has been a priority for Southern Baptists who have passed numerous [resolutions](#) on the topic at our annual Convention meetings. We resolve to continue to engage immigration, and all other issues, in the manner our trustees have directed, looking to Scripture, the *Baptist Faith & Message*, and the actions taken by messengers at annual Convention meetings, who have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to honor the dignity of every person and share the gospel with people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.



◀ Practical and theological church guides are a hallmark of the ERLC's Resourcing the Church Initiative.

Research

RESEARCH UNDERGIRDS AND SUPPORTS ALL THAT WE DO AT THE ERLC. The research team works to assist the churches of the SBC in two ways. First, the team operates at a deep level to provide the solid biblical, theological, and ethical foundations that serve as the basis of our work in the public square. Second, in concert with that work, and collaborating closely with the communications team, the research team provides our churches with a variety of resources that help equip them to engage their community with the demands of God's Word.

Resourcing the Church Initiative

The research team's top priority has been leading the Resourcing the Church Initiative (RCI). To best serve our churches, the research team is dedicated to addressing the pressing cultural and ethical issues affecting our churches, particularly those requiring theological, ethical, and pastoral responses. The RCI is an effort designed to

incorporates godly pastoral wisdom to address practical, real-world scenarios that churches encounter, building on and applying the theological affirmations.

Each guide is produced after months of in-depth research and convenings that bring together pastors, ethicists, theologians, and (sometimes) policy experts. A thorough editing process ensures that the content aligns with

The team operates at a deep level to provide the solid biblical, theological, and ethical foundations that serve as the basis of our work in the public square. . . The research team provides our churches with a variety of resources that help equip them to engage their community with the demands of God's Word.

equip pastors and ministry leaders with practical resources to tackle some of these issues. The foundations of our work are grounded in Scripture, the BF&M 2000, and the actions taken by messengers at SBC annual meetings.

Church Guides

One of our top resources as part of our RCI is our church guides. They are conceptualized in response to important ethical issues that churches face, serving as a resource for pastors and churchgoers to utilize in their local contexts. Some of these guides were produced in response to ethical concerns explicitly expressed by local churches and state associations. A top priority of the research team is to listen to the voices of our churches and provide resources that align with our institutional sphere of responsibility, helping them serve effectively in their ministry contexts.

Each church guide contains two sections. The first section presents a theological and ethical framework grounded in Scripture and faithful to our denomination's confession of faith, the *BF&M 2000*. The second section

incorporates godly pastoral wisdom to address practical, real-world scenarios that churches encounter, building on and applying the theological affirmations.

Scripture and the *BF&M 2000*. Although they address contemporary cultural issues that confront our churches, the goal is to make the content as evergreen as possible. The success of past church guides, especially the high demand for "[God's Good Design: A Practical Guide to Answering Gender Confusion](#)" ahead of state conventions, underscores the need for these practical, theological resources. Since September of 2024, the research team has developed and released four church guides.

1. "[Created in the Image of God: A Practical Guide to Building a Culture of Life](#)"
2. "[Pay to Play: A Practical Guide to Addressing Gambling in the Church](#)"
3. "[Dual Citizens: A Practical Guide to Christian Citizenship and Civic Engagement](#)"
4. "[The Work of Our Hands: Christian Ministry in the Age of Artificial Intelligence](#)"

The RCI successfully brought us to a total of four guides, one in each of our emphasis areas, and allowed us

to showcase and distribute them at the 2025 SBC Annual Meeting in Dallas, where many of our churches were represented. Our goal moving forward is to produce one church guide per emphasis area each year, making them available at subsequent Annual Meetings.

Spanish Language Guides

Since September, the ERLC has also worked to create the first Spanish translation of one of our resources. The Spanish translation of “God’s Good Design,” [“El Buen Diseño de Dios: Una Guía Práctica Para Responder a la Confusión de Génerothe,”](#) was released in February 2025 in both digital and print versions.

Since the release of that work, all of our guides have been translated into Spanish and are currently available for [print and/or download](#).

White Papers

Significant research undergirds our efforts across the organization and, as a part of that work, the research team produces papers that point to the foundations of the ERLC’s positions on specific topics. These white papers delve into an academic study of the theological and ethical principles that inform and shape our stances on vital cultural matters.

Earlier this year, we published [“Don’t Bet On It: A Biblical and Theological Foundation Opposing Sports Gambling,”](#) which serves as a foundational companion to the gambling church guide and provides a thorough biblical, theological, and policy analysis of sports gambling and its numerous consequences. We also published a second paper, [“Infertility & the Longing for Children: Considering the Ethical Implications of Assisted Reproductive Technologies.”](#)

This paper serves as a foundational resource for churches to think through the biblical, theological, and bioethical implications of treatments like IVF and other assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs).

Research Institute

The Research Institute provides a collaborative space for over 40 Southern Baptist researchers and academics from across our Convention of churches. Our Research fellows serve as a resource on theological and policy matters in their areas of expertise. These respected scholars come from diverse fields, including theology, ethics, philosophy, law, and public policy. Fellows must:



▲ Gambling was just one of several topics given extensive treatment in a Research white paper.



[Our Research Institute gathering] is an opportunity for our Research fellows to convene on pertinent issues in their fields and to collaborate on ideas and projects that benefit our Convention.

1. Affirm, by their signature, the *BF&M* confessional statement.
2. Be an active member in good standing of a local Southern Baptist church.
3. Be a person of godly Christian character.
4. Adhere to the basic moral commitments of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.
5. Be actively involved in the study of moral, public policy, and religious liberty issues.

Research fellows are not compensated by the ERLC for serving as fellows, nor do their views necessarily represent those of the ERLC.

Since its relaunch in 2024, our Research Institute has been focused on several key initiatives to invest in the ministries of our fellows and strengthen the foundations of our work at the ERLC. First, we have had the privilege of hosting a number of scholars to speak about their latest works in the form of fellows' lectures. These lectures also serve as a

way for our fellows to connect and dig deep into vital issues concerning our work serving churches and ministry leaders.

Second, we hosted our second annual Research Institute gathering in Nashville. This year's gathering and papers focused on American constitutionalism and Baptist political philosophy in the lead-up to the 250th anniversary of the American experiment. It is an opportunity for our Research fellows to convene on pertinent issues in their fields and to collaborate on ideas and projects that benefit our Convention.

Lastly, our fellows have been actively writing and publishing resources for the Church in places such as *World Opinions*, *The Gospel Coalition*, *National Review*, *9Marks*, *Liberty Magazine*, *NAE Magazine*, *World Magazine*, *Dignitas*, *Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity*, *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, *Midwestern Journal of Theology*, *Journal of Christian Legal Thought*, *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, and an array of publishers including *B&H Academic*, *IVP Academic*, and *Eerdmans*.



▲ The ERLC booth at the 2025 Annual Meeting of the SBC allowed staff to interact with fellow Southern Baptists across the country.

Communications

COMMUNICATIONS IS ABOUT connection. It enables us to connect our mission, work, and staff to our audience. Over the past year, we have increased our communications efforts and adjusted our messaging in order to connect with Southern Baptists, reminding them that the ERLC bolsters and serves—not distracts or

detracts from—the gospel mission of the Southern Baptist Convention. Since promoting Lindsay Nicolet, a 10 year veteran of the team, to director of Communications, the team has expanded efforts in order to answer the questions Southern Baptists are asking, combat misinformation, and show how the access and

effectiveness of advocacy work has real-world implications for our SBC pastors and churches.

One of the biggest shifts we’ve made in our communications strategy is moving from talking about our work to directly *showing* our work. We want Southern Baptists to have confidence that the ERLC is for them. Because of

this emphasis, we centered our communications assets this year around key objectives including:

- Increasing awareness and trust of the ERLC’s work among SBC local pastors and leaders
- Projecting stability and steadiness
- Building trust and credibility among policymakers in Washington, D.C.

From adapting a new media strategy, to creating multiple podcast series, to strengthening our email marketing, and starting a Defund Planned Parenthood initiative, we have sought to build trust with good-faith Southern Baptists despite active disinformation campaigns from several bad-faith detractors.

PR/Press

One of the primary ways we inform Southern Baptists of our work is through our press and media relations. In 2025, we placed more effort into media output than we have in several years—an effort which gained the attention of lawmakers and government leaders and helped establish trust and recognition among fellow Southern Baptists.

Op-eds

In the past year, we saw massive growth and success in our press and media relations. The primary factor was a concerted effort to produce more opinion editorials. Through op-ed

placements in national publications, we reintroduced the media to ERLC leadership and elevated their voices on critical topics at the intersection of faith and culture. These efforts resulted in 13 op-eds being distributed by national publications on topics that Southern Baptists care about such as:

- Skrmetti and religious liberty, [Brent Leatherwood for The Tennessean](#)
- Sports betting, [RaShan Frost for The Gospel Coalition](#)
- The March for Life and future of the pro-life movement, [Brent Leatherwood for USA Today](#)



▲ RaShan Frost wrote an op-ed for The Gospel Coalition highlighting the dangers of the sports betting industry.

In 2025, we placed more effort into media output than we have in several years—an effort which gained the attention of lawmakers and government leaders and helped establish trust and recognition among fellow Southern Baptists.

- Importance of defunding Planned Parenthood, [Brent Leatherwood for National Review](#)
- The harmful effects of gender transitions procedures on children, [Brent Leatherwood and Randy Davis for Christian Post](#)

Media Hits

Through the reach of these op-eds, we were able to represent the ERLC on national radio, television, print,

and online outlets. We also participated in podcast interviews with several Baptist state conventions in Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Texas to talk about the intersection of our work and how the ERLC partners alongside and serves our state conventions on matters of importance to Southern Baptists. Some popular topics we’ve addressed include faith and politics, the sanctity of human life, Supreme Court cases that overlap

with our work, and issues regarding marriage and family. The top outlets we’ve had interviews with include:

- Christian Post
- Politico
- World Magazine
- RNS
- American Family News
- The New York Times
- The Hill
- Reuters
- The Dallas Morning News



▲ CBN hosted RaShan Frost for a discussion about sports gambling.

Our staff conducted a total of 69 media interviews, including print, online, radio, podcast, and television in the 2024–2025 media cycle for the fiscal year. Some additional statistics in the press field include:

- 33 press releases distributed
- 68 interviews
- 13 op-eds published
- 4,504 total media hits
- 13 billion potential media impressions

2024-2025 MEDIA CYCLE STATISTICS

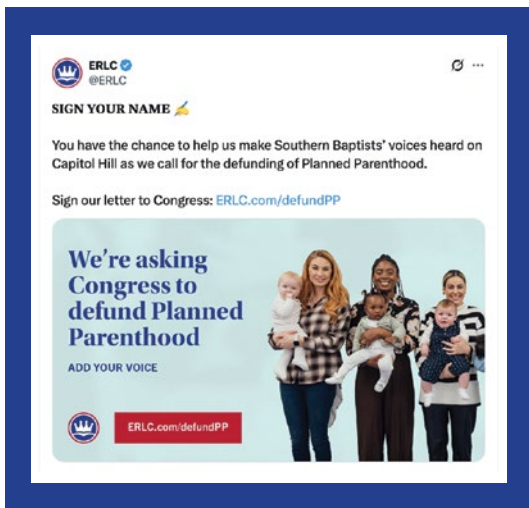
13
op-eds
published

4,504
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press releases
distributed

68
interviews

13,000,000,000 potential media impressions



◀ Over 30,000 Southern Baptists and pro-life advocates joined our call for Congress to defund Planned Parenthood.

subscribers, state convention partners, and social media followers. We received over 1,000 responses with 75% of those coming from our email subscribers and the remaining 25%

coming from state convention partners and Baptists Press readers. The responses reveal both encouraging consensus and critical engagement challenges.

Respondents demonstrated strong unity around core ERLC priorities with these five emerging as clear top concerns across all demographics:

- pro-life advocacy,
- biblical marriage,
- opposing gender ideology,
- protecting religious liberty,
- stopping human trafficking.

Results did show some variation in topics of interest due to geographic

location. Respondents living in the southwestern states indicated a higher priority of addressing border security and immigration issues. Those living in the northeastern states indicated a higher priority for criminal justice reform.

The survey showed respondents chose email as the top communication medium in which they'd like to engage with the ERLC. It also showed that our audience finds ERLC articles, email newsletters, and church guides to be the most helpful assets we produce.

The message from the survey is clear that we must maintain our strong theological positions on issues where there is great agreement while investing in the growth of state convention relationships. These state convention partners allow more nuanced engagement strategies for diverse regional contexts and enable us to build support from local churches for the mission assigned to us by the SBC.

Defund Planned Parenthood

This year presented an enormous opportunity to mobilize Southern Baptists during this year's reconciliation process and finally stop the flow of taxpayer dollars to Planned Parenthood. We were able to encourage Baptist cooperation by developing a letter to Congress where we could join our voices in saying: "It's time to defund Planned Parenthood."

We garnered over 30,000 signatures online from faithful Southern

These numbers are reflective of our activity and witness in the public square.

Social/Marketing

Over the past year, the communications team has continued to strengthen our connections with Southern Baptists through audience involvement in advocacy campaigns, real-time displays of our work, and enhanced email marketing.

ERLC Audience Survey

In Q1 of 2025, we sent a short survey to our audience of email

The message from the survey is clear that we must maintain our strong theological positions on issues where there is great agreement while investing in the growth of state convention relationships.

Baptists and other pro-life voices, including SBC entity heads, past Convention presidents, pastors, and laypeople.

The success of this campaign reveals that Southern Baptists continue to hold firmly to our biblical conviction that all human beings—including the preborn—are made in the image of God and thus deserve to be protected. It also demonstrated the real effect of amplifying the voices of Southern Baptists in the public square.

SBC Annual Meeting

Leading up to the Annual Meeting in Dallas, we wanted to have a touchpoint with as many SBC churches as possible. Knowing that many church members across the country do not utilize digital communications and may not even be aware of our work, we mailed copies of our church guide, “[God’s Good Design: A Practical Guide for Answering Gender Confusion](#),” with a specially designed wrap cover to every SBC church.

In addition, onsite at the Annual Meeting in Dallas, we dropped a printed tri-fold in over 15,000 chairs ahead of our entity report. This printed card communicated who the ERLC is, what value we provide Southern Baptist churches, and recent policy wins complete with QR codes for easy access to more information on [erlc.com](#).

At the ERLC booth at the Annual Meeting in Dallas, we strategically



▲ TOP: At SBC25, we placed 15,000 informational pieces about the ERLC on attendees’ chairs; BOTTOM: ERLC stickers for our various areas of work allow Southern Baptists to advocate with creativity.



◀ The Weekly cultivates the latest ERLC resources for pastors and ministry leaders as they seek to apply the Bible to cultural issues.

ability to deliver tailored content straight to the inboxes of our audience makes it an effective way to get our message to Southern Baptists. In particular, we saw the positive impact of email as we executed our pre-SBC 25 strategy—making sure our audience was well aware of the work we do to serve churches in the public square—and saw incredible results and feedback. Email outreach enabled us to build relationships and trust with our pastors and churches. Our weekly newsletter, event marketing, and special updates about featured media hits are just some of the ways we are able to remain connected to those we serve.

The Weekly

This email rundown, highlighting political and cultural issues affecting our churches and how the ERLC is advocating, serves as an essential resource for Southern Baptist pastors and churches. We use this email to cultivate ERLC assets that our pastors and church leaders may not have time to research themselves.

The Weekly features four key sections: the weekly lead, policy, research, and resources. In a rapidly changing cultural and political landscape, it is crucial that our leaders are informed and equipped to address the challenges they face.

tailored all of our materials to center around the four areas in which we work. These materials included printed church guides, buttons, and stickers. These are natural launching points for conversations into the work of the ERLC in each area, or in whichever most resonates with a person visiting the booth. These resources are designed to equip pastors

and church leaders while also giving them creative ways to join in areas of advocacy they might be interested in.

Email

The results of our survey in February 2025 confirmed that email is still the preferred communication method of our audience, even in an age of social media. Email's direct reach and

The Weekly not only keeps pastors updated on critical developments but also provides them with a thoughtful, biblical perspective on how these issues intersect with their ministries. This assists pastors by providing information and analysis that is helpful to them as they seek to proactively guide their congregations with wisdom and clarity, grounded in the gospel.

Social Media

Social media is a useful platform for showing our work, especially in real time. It provides us with an opportunity to provide small, digestible pieces of information regarding things like day-to-day policy advocacy meetings, new research assets, interpreting a recent Supreme Court decision, or even combatting disinformation about the ERLC. For much of this past year, our engagement on social media through Facebook, X, and Instagram has been geared more intentionally than ever with placing information and resources directly at our audience's fingertips. These posts are a consistent reminder to Southern Baptists that the ERLC is still here to serve them.

Yet, social media engagement is tricky, as each platform requires a different approach. For example, X and Facebook are vehicles through which we promote and link our online resources, press interviews, research assets, and feature other current events that involve the ERLC.

Conversely, Instagram is a platform curated for direct access to content. Thus, where we are able to feature links in order to tease content on X and Facebook, Instagram requires us to repackage our content through videos and graphics to engage our audience, giving more direct access and a longer shelf life to some of our

through online and in-person gatherings. Furthermore, by recording the video and audio, we are able to diversify and continue our use of the material for building up the Church.

SBC Sunday Night Event

This year at our Annual Meeting, an event came together quickly,

Regardless of the medium at play, these platforms place our content and our work at a broader reach.

best accomplishments. Regardless of the medium at play, these platforms place our content and our work at a broader reach.

Another factor at play is the type of engagement we receive. While audience participation on our Facebook and Instagram accounts is generally positive, X is often more negative and has become the place where the majority of disinformation is shared. Over the next year, our goal is to identify the best stewardship plan for each platform so that we can engage our different audiences and build trust based in truth with good-faith actors.

Events

Events are an additional means by which we are able to carry out our ministry assignment, providing encouragement to Southern Baptists

giving us a chance to host members of the House and Senate as well as the Trump-nominated ambassador for religious freedom. On Sunday night, we hosted several hundred people for "Southern Baptists Serving in the Public Square." Brent Leatherwood interviewed fellow Southern Baptists Sen. James Lankford, Congressman Nathaniel Moran, and Ambassador-designate Mark Walker for an eye-opening discussion about what it takes to be a Christian in Washington, D.C., and how Southern Baptists can influence culture.

SBC Tuesday Lunch Event

On Tuesday of the Annual Meeting, we had a packed lunch event called "Protecting our Kids at the Supreme Court." We were privileged to host a pre-panel conversation



▲ CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Attorney General Jonathan Skrametti joined the ERLC for a lunch event at SBC25; Congressman Moran addresses fellow Southern Baptists at the ERLC's SBC25 event; Sen. Lankford, Ambassador-designate Mark Walker, and Congressman Moran spoke about being a Southern Baptist in the public square at the ERLC's Sunday night event at SBC25.



featuring several Baptist state executives including Nathan Lorick, executive director of Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Julio Guarneri, executive director of Baptist General Convention of Texas Convention,

respond with wisdom. In every situation—from a child whose views on gender and sexuality are being challenged in school, to a pastor advocating against unbiblical policies in their state—it is our goal to

In every situation . . . it is our goal to provide Southern Baptists with resources that strengthen their faith and embolden them to bring truth and hope to the public square.

and Randy Davis, executive director of Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, as they talked with Brent Leatherwood about our partnership in filing amicus briefs in Supreme Court cases for 2025. Afterward, for the main panel, Brent talked to Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti and Alliance Defending Freedom’s Vice President Ryan Bangert about why the *U.S. v. Skrmetti* case mattered for protecting minors from harmful gender transition interventions.

Resources

Since its inception, the ERLC has been devoted to providing Southern Baptists with biblically faithful and practical resources. Our assets help every Southern Baptist understand what is going on culturally and politically and how to

provide Southern Baptists with resources that strengthen their faith and embolden them to bring truth and hope to the public square.

Podcast

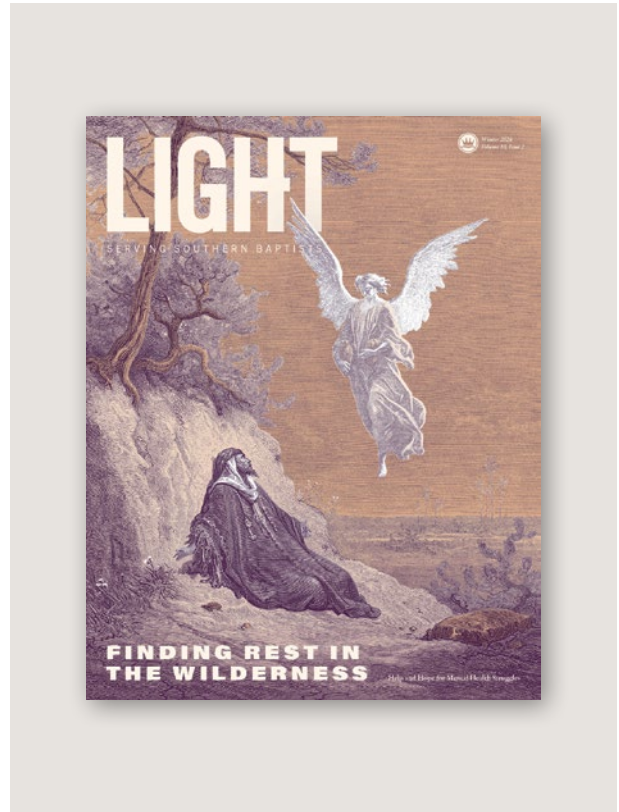
With the popularity of podcasts growing, we see The ERLC Podcast as a way for people to encounter our work in an accessible way. The podcast was the second preferred form of communication on our recent survey. Whether they listen on the way to work or while completing tasks around the house, our podcast helps inform Southern Baptists about important cultural issues and how to respond to them. We release a podcast episode every other week, often corresponding with our four areas of work. Here are the four series we ran this past year:

THE ERLC IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

- [How the ERLC works in D.C. for Southern Baptist Churches](#) with Brent Leatherwood, Hannah Daniel, and Allison Cantrell
- [Why a Southern Baptist witness before the executive branch is vital](#) with Rachel Morrison
- [What Southern Baptists should know about the judicial branch](#) with Palmer Williams and Lathan Watts
- [Making the voice of Southern Baptists heard in the legislative branch](#) with David Closson
- [How the ERLC research team supports our work in D.C.](#) with RaShan Frost
- [Sen. Lankford on being a Christian in the public square](#) with Sen. James Lankford
- [Defunding Planned Parenthood](#) with Congressman Nathaniel Moran
- [100 Years of the SBC Cooperative Program](#) with Tony Wolfe and Madison Grace

MARRIAGE & FAMILY

- [A parent’s rights and responsibilities in an age of gender confusion](#) with Krissie Inserra and Benjamin Quinn
- [What is the Skrmetti Supreme Court Case?](#) with Kayla Toney and Matt Sharp
- [How Southern Baptists are working together on gender and sexuality issues](#) with Dane Hays and Tim Lubinus



▲ LEFT: The ERLC Podcast is an effective way to equip Southern Baptists on the go; RIGHT: Our Winter 2024 issue of *Light* magazine addressed the need to care for the mental health of church members.

- [How Christians can evaluate cultural views of marriage and sexuality](#) by Gregg Allison

WASHINGTON, D.C. UPDATES

- [Voting for a culture of life this election season](#) with Hannah Daniel and Brent Leatherwood
- [How Baptist state conventions are engaging abortion ballot initiatives](#) with William Isaacson and Joel Gilbert
- [What the 2024 election results mean for SBC advocacy](#) with Hannah Daniel and Brent Leatherwood

SERVING CHURCHES IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

- [ERLC hosts pastors in Washington, D.C.](#) with Brent Leatherwood and Benjamin Bolin
- [Defunding Planned Parenthood](#) with Christopher Mills and Brent Leatherwood
- [How can churches address sports betting?](#) with Bryant Sims and Daniel Darling
- [Your questions answered, pt. 1](#) and [Your questions answered, pt. 2](#) with Brent Leatherwood, Miles Mullin, and Bobby Reed
- [A Q&A with ERLC Trustee Chairman Scott Foshie](#)

- [Why is the Skremetti Supreme Court case important?](#) with Matt Sharp

Light

While our podcasts cover the digital sphere, we provide our audience who prefer physical resources with *Light* magazines. Published biannually in a summer and winter edition, each issue focuses on a specific topic, such as gender confusion or the pro-life movement. The content of each issue ranges from interviews with staff members to articles from experts in the given field.

“[Finding Rest in the Wilderness](#),” our winter 2024 issue, focused on

offering help and hope to those facing mental health struggles. With deaths of despair (suicide and drug-related overdoses) rising drastically in the past year, we saw this as a relevant problem to discuss from a human dignity standpoint. Articles and authors include:

- A firsthand account of a pastor’s experience with clinical depression by Mark Dance
- A small-town pastor’s journey from addiction to Christ by Lindsay Nicolet
- The relationship between spiritual and mental health by Brad Hambrick

From longform white papers that provide a deep dive into the biblical and theological commitments of Southern Baptists that undergird our work, to explainers that help break down a specific case in the Supreme Court, our online assets are a collaboration between all of our teams and enable us to come alongside our churches as they seek to understand developments in our culture and apply biblical convictions to their contexts.

ARTICLES & EXPLAINERS

Our articles aim to view relevant topics from a biblical perspective.

our areas of work. We released multiple articles updating our audience with the work we did for these cases. One article that sums this work up is [Five Supreme Court cases the ERLC is engaged in](#). You can view all of our Supreme Court work at our [SCOTUS](#) page.

- 2025 marked 10 years since the Obergefell ruling that legalized same-sex marriage in our country. We provide an analysis titled [10 years after Obergefell: Four effects on religious liberty, marriage and family, and sexuality](#).
- In light of our Defunding Planned Parenthood initiative, we pointed out key provisions of the reconciliation bill with [Explainer: Southern Baptist priorities in the final budget reconciliation bill](#)
- In light of the harmful legislation that Colorado’s governor passed earlier this year, we produced a resource to help Christians respond well titled [Explainer: The dangers of the Kelly Loving Act](#)

ABORTION BALLOT INITIATIVES

The communications team was able to work with the policy team in order to help voters across America who were faced with deciding on state abortion ballot initiatives before the 2024 election. We released numerous state-specific resources, many in conjunction with those

Explainers help make the information more accessible to Southern Baptists and shed light on how the ERLC is serving Southern Baptists on a particular issue.

Our future plans for *Light* are changing as we look ahead to another year and evaluate the best strategy and use of resources to build trust within the SBC.

Online Assets

We provide various resources through our website that help Southern Baptists address cultural, moral, and ethical issues with biblical faithfulness and confidence.

Some of our most referenced articles are explainers that unpack sometimes confusing and complex ethical and policy-related issues. Explainers help make the information more accessible to Southern Baptists and shed light on how the ERLC is serving Southern Baptists on a particular issue. Here are some major topics we covered in our articles this past year:

- We engaged in multiple Supreme Court cases this year that covered

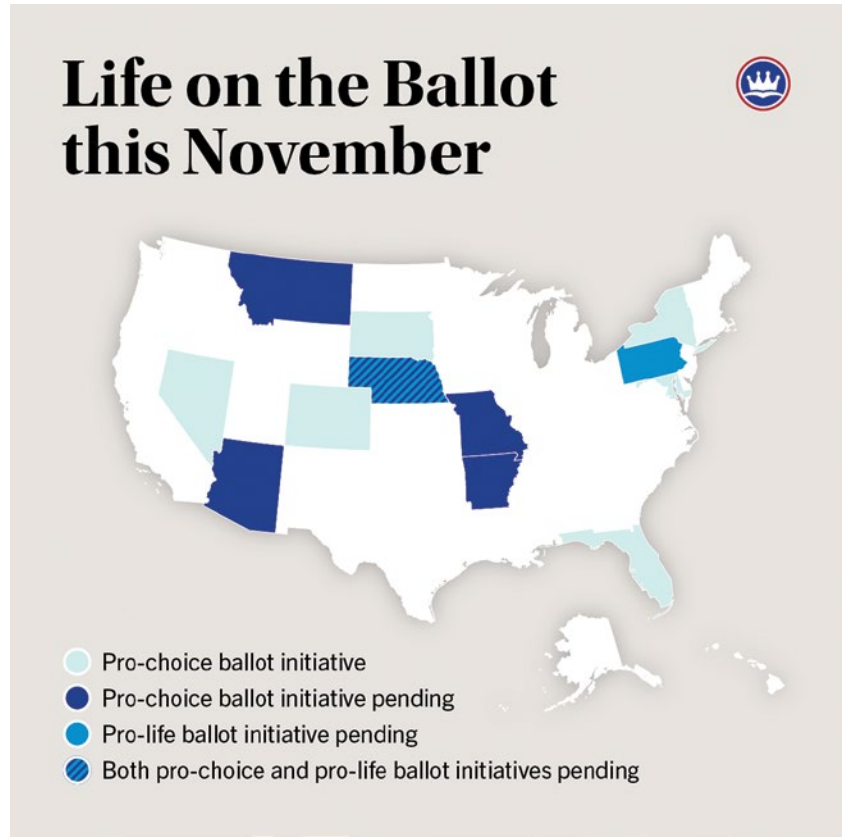
► **TOP:** The ERLC’s abortion ballot initiative equipped SBC churches to stand for life in their communities; **BOTTOM:** Every year, the ERLC produces bulletin inserts that correspond to SBC Sundays.

state Baptist conventions. [Resources](#) included a map on our website highlighting states with these ballots, as well as explainers, bulletin inserts, slide graphics, a prayer guide, and videos.

BULLETIN INSERTS

Many churchgoers still prefer a physical asset that they can easily tuck into their Bibles. These free, downloadable resources are a relatively simple way for us to meet the needs of churches.

- When the Colorado House of Representatives passed a bill that would promote radical gender ideology to minors, strip fundamental parental rights, and burden free speech, we joined Colorado Baptists to produce an educational resource for their churches: [ERLC and Colorado Baptists Urge You to Oppose Radical Gender Ideology Bill](#)
- Every year, we create free bulletin inserts for use by Southern Baptist churches on emphasis days associated with the SBC calendar. Topics include: [Life](#), [Religious Liberty](#), [Racial Reconciliation](#), [Orphans and Widows](#), and [Caring Well](#)





▲ Miles Mullin welcomed attendees to “An Evening with Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti,” co-hosted by Union University and the ERLC.

Staff Representation & Church Engagement

ENGAGING WITH SBC PASTORS CHURCHES, STATE conventions, and other entities is at the heart of our cooperation within the SBC. At last year's trustee meeting, we identified the need to more effectively connect with churches all over the country. In January, we brought on Daniel Darling for a limited time to work with us on a contract basis as a Church Engagement Strategist. Dan is a former ERLC employee, pastor, and current director of the Land Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was instrumental in helping us build relationships with pastors during the critical window of time leading up to the 2025 Annual Meeting.

Ultimately, at the ERLC, all of us are church engagement staff members. We serve in our local churches, connect with church and ministry leaders on a regular basis, and do our work in order to build up the Church. More formally, many of our staff members have traveled in order to speak, host events, and represent the ERLC. For example, in the Spring, Church Engagement Strategist Dan Darling traveled to the Georgia Evangelism conference to spend time with pastors there while Bobby Reed led breakout sessions at the annual Alabama Ministry Assistants conference. In another example, this fall, staff members attended multiple Baptist state conventions where we connected with the pastors gathered there to promote our work and receive feedback.

President's Office

Knowing that relationships with our state convention

leaders are vital to our Southern Baptist cooperation, Brent Leatherwood worked hard during his administration to strengthen these relationships. As he has done each year, he attended the annual meeting of the SBC state executives. He also gave a keynote address at the state convention meeting in Iowa and attended the Empower conference in Texas where he spoke at the Young Pastors Network Dinner.

In addition, Brent engaged Baptist associational leaders. He spoke to the SBCAL both via webinar in late 2024 and at their first ever annual retreat in 2025. He also traveled to Minnesota to meet with a group of pastors at their association and to Gadsden, Alabama, to speak to pastors at an event there.

We serve in our local churches, connect with church and ministry leaders on a regular basis, and do our work in order to build up the Church.

Brent, often alongside Miles Mullin, made multiple trips to Washington, D.C., in order to build trust in our nation's capital, meet with policymakers, connect with coalition leaders, interacting with pastors, and attend important events. Brent even had the unique privilege to be in the gallery for the oral arguments of the pivotal *Skrmetti* case.

In appreciation for the ERLC's partnership in filing an amicus brief in *Skrmetti*, Attorney General Skrmetti traveled to Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, for a dinner

event discussing the importance of the case with Brent before a group of West Tennessee pastors and leaders.

After serving faithfully, Brent Leatherwood resigned as president of the ERLC effective July 31, 2025. Miles Mullin served as acting president until the trustees elected Dr. Gary Hollingsworth as interim president beginning Oct. 1.

Research

The research team is committed to church engagement through the Resourcing the Church Initiative, partnering with our Southern Baptist seminaries, and attending our state association meetings.

In 2025, RaShan presented at the Evangelical Theological Society's (ETS) Southeastern regional conference at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS). He and Matthew Blankenship attended the International Alliance of Christian Educators' Faculty and Staff Development Conference held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS). This year, Jason Thacker, director of the Research Institute, and many of our other research fellows presented papers at the ETS Annual Meeting in Boston.

The annual Research Institute Gathering is also an opportunity to brainstorm how to leverage the Institute for church engagement. Each fellow is a member of an SBC church and many work for Baptist institutions, thus

maintaining regular contact with pastors, ministry leaders, and students. While they are not ERLC staff, these gifted men and women work diligently to serve the churches of the SBC alongside our staff.

We also partnered with the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at SWBTS to convene a ministry symposium on sports gambling at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. This was an opportunity to equip



▲ Daniel Darling and RaShan Frost hosted a sports gambling summit in Texas on behalf of the ERLC.



▲ LEFT: RaShan Frost shared on a panel on life issues at The Timothy Project Conference in Jackson, MS; RIGHT: ERLC staff represented Southern Baptists' conviction for the sanctity for life at an event hosted by Speaker Johnson and Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America.

pastors on the issue of sports gambling as legislation was being considered in Texas that would legalize the practice.

We joined the Bush Center for Faith and Culture at SEBTS for a summit on artificial reproductive technologies. Research Institute director Jason Thacker and research fellows, Benjamin Quinn, Evan Lenow, and Mark Liederbach all helped lead the meeting, which included a

Impact conference held at Shandon Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina. He and Miles attended the NC Baptists' discipleship conference held at The Summit Church in Raleigh, South Carolina. RaShan, along with Lizzy Taylor, attended The Timothy Project Discipleship Conference at Colonial Heights Baptist Church in Ridgeland, Mississippi. RaShan represent-

ed the ERLC at Lifeway's Black Church Leadership and Family Conference held at Ridgecrest Conference Center. He also spoke at chapels for North Greenville University and Boyce College.

The research team is committed to church engagement through the Resourcing the Church Initiative, partnering with our Southern Baptist seminaries, and attending our state association meetings.

number of pastors, counselors, and seminary students to be a part of the event.

We also attended several state and local church discipleship conferences. RaShan attended the SC Baptists'

Southern Baptists who will be a part of bringing truth and hope to the public square. This year, our interns served in our Washington, D.C., office and were instrumental in producing key resources for our churches.

Internship

Every year, our internship program is a source of joy and an important way in which we help equip the next generation of

Psalm 139 Project

THE PSALM 139 PROJECT, A PRO-LIFE MINISTRY OF THE ERLC, exists to place ultrasound machines in pregnancy resource centers and pro-life clinics. Each placement allows abortion-vulnerable and abortion-determined women to get a glimpse of the life inside them. One hundred percent of all donations given to the Psalm 139 Project go toward the purchase of life-saving machines and the training of the clinic staff who will utilize them.

Since August of 2025, we have placed four machines. This brings the total number of machines placed since the Psalm 139 Project's conception to 97!

- Hartsville, TN
- Anchorage, AK
- Williston, VT
- Burlington, NC

These placements were made possible by partnerships with Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, North American Mission Board, NC Baptists, Provision Financial Resources (NC Baptist Foundation) Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Baptist Convention of New England, churches, and individual donors.

The ERLC, through the Psalm 139 Project, has worked toward doing real, on-the-ground pro-life work by placing life-saving ultrasound machines in pro-choice states. The rise of abortion tourism—travel for the purpose of obtaining an abortion where it's legal—and the abortion pill means that pro-life advocates have much work that still needs to be done. To that end, we announced a new emphasis of the Psalm 139 Project called "[Across State Lines](#),"

in which individuals, churches, state conventions, and other SBC entities, particularly in more strongly pro-life states, can partner with the ERLC to place ultrasound machines in pregnancy centers located in pro-choice states.

One recipient of an ultrasound through "Across State Lines" was Community Pregnancy Center in Anchorage, Alaska, in September. This placement was a partnership

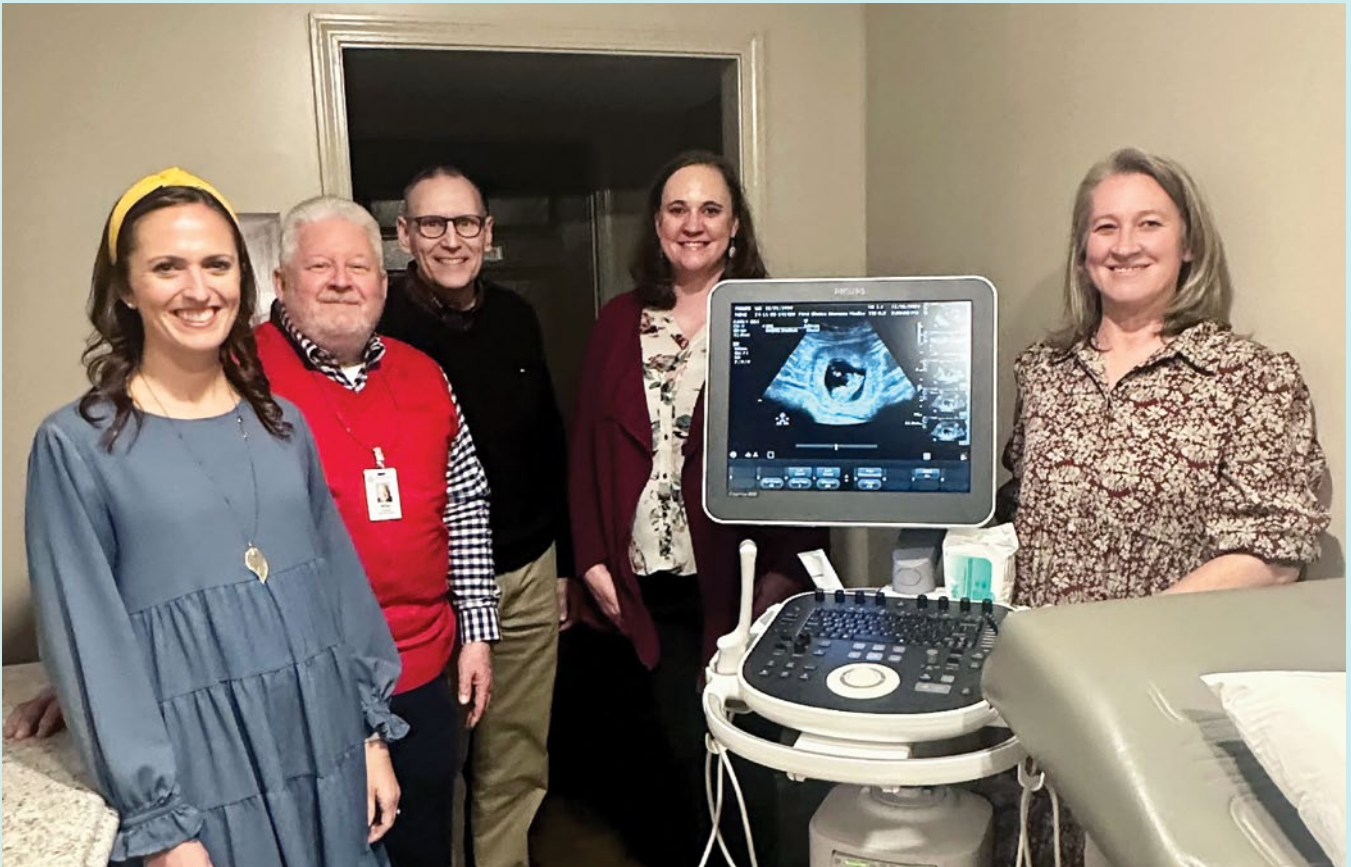
The Psalm 139 Project stands ready to enable pregnancy centers to shine a light on the precious life of every person, serve vulnerable women, and change families for generations.

between the Psalm 139 Project, and the Alabama State Board of Missions.

The Psalm 139 Project stands ready to enable pregnancy centers to shine a light on the precious life of every person, serve vulnerable women, and change families for generations. We invite you to join us through prayer and giving toward this end.



◀ Rachel Wiles represented the ERLC at Psalm 139 Projects dedications in Hartsville, TN, McKenzie, TN, and Wetumpka, AL.





We count it an honor to serve you, Southern Baptists, as you bring the truth and hope of God’s Word and the good news of Jesus Christ to those around you. We invite you to join us in the call to protect life, defend religious liberty, champion God’s good design for marriage and family, and honor human dignity in our churches, communities, and larger culture. Together, we can live as salt and light in a complex and confusing public square that is in desperate need of the sanity and peace that our Lord brings. We are thankful for the truth that our work is not in vain and look forward to what God will accomplish through his Church over the next year.

