

Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force takes first steps

September 19, 2022

NASHVILLE (BP)—After the initial meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force, the group publicly pledged to begin its work by focusing on several mandates from the convention.

Those tasks include retaining an individual or firm to receive reports related to abuse, creating the Ministry Check database and helping the Credentials Committee retain a qualified firm for assistance in matters related to allegations of or mishandling of allegations of sexual abuse.

The public statement from the task force, released [online](#) Sept. 16, comes almost three months since Southern Baptists approved a report that called for extensive measures to address sexual abuse in the convention.

Oklahoma pastor Mike Keahbone, vice chair of the task force, said the group originally set a goal of meeting by the end of September. That date was moved up to Labor Day, due to their collective confirmation of the importance of their work.

‘Complete unity on where we want to be’

The group is unified in its purpose, he said, but in a room filled with strong personalities, there will be some disagreement. Keahbone considered that a positive.

“We’re not going to be on the same page every time, but we’re in complete

unity on where we want to be,” he said. “This is a great group of skilled people who are very passionate about this subject. I left the meeting very energized.”

Marshall Blalock, task force chairman, is currently out of the country and unavailable for comment.

The task force and advisers have consulted with those who served on the Sexual Abuse Task Force that brought the Anaheim recommendations, the update stated. They also met with SBC Executive Committee members, leadership and legal counsel as well as members and leaders of the Credentials Committee.

“While we firmly believe that each recommendation passed by the messengers is important and must be carried out,” the statement read, “the [task force] has initially prioritized the following mandates and requests based on the needs of survivors and the convention.”

Those mandates are:

- “The retaining of an individual or firm who is qualified and trauma-informed to receive reports of abuse or mishandling of abuse, determine the proper entity, association or church to respond to that report and communicate this report to the relevant parties.
- “The creation of the Ministry Check database, which will house the names of those credibly accused of sexual abuse in order to ensure thorough information flow throughout the Convention and better resource churches to protect their congregations.
- “Assisting the Credentials Committee in retaining a qualified firm to assist them in their processes and in performing factual inquiries related to sexual abuse. As of right now, more than 200 referrals have been made to the Credentials Committee related to SBC churches and it is imperative that we equip and resource our CC

members to respond to these reports.”

The task force will continue researching models and firms to assist in its work. Those firms with expertise in the area of sexual abuse and wanting to offer their services can do so through contact@sataskforce.net. Submissions must be made by Sept. 30.

The group expects to provide updates “at least” bi-monthly through its website, which will include announcements of any firms selected. That information will also include the letter of engagement, explanation of the work being performed and an overview of the anticipated process.

The task force was formed through the recommendations included in the Guidepost Solutions report last spring. An amendment approved at the Anaheim annual meeting specified the group would work within “best practices in keeping with Southern Baptist church polity for feasibility.”

The initial report from the task force will be presented at the 2023 SBC annual meeting in New Orleans.

“We are deeply grateful for the proactive steps that messengers have taken in the past two years, overwhelmingly approving a transparent and independent investigation as well as beginning steps to reform,” the task force statement read. “Nevertheless, we recognize that deep damage has been done, that trust is earned and reform is never-ending.”

The nine-member task force selected by SBC President Bart Barber also formerly announced it had retained attorney Rachael Denhollander and licensed clinical social worker Heather Evans to advise the group “on best practices and standards for survivor care and institutional reform.”

“We should never minimize or excuse what has taken place in our convention, our hearts are broken for what has been done and the suffering that was caused,” the task force statement concluded.

“We likewise firmly believe that as Christians, it is our mandate and command to stand with the vulnerable and against those who would do such evil. We ask for your prayers as we engage in this work.”