

Baptist convention's former president under investigation

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Bob Stine, former president of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, will be required to answer questions in court after police in Madison, Wisc., recommended he be charged with sexual assault.

The Dane County district attorney's office said the case involving Stine, pastor of Midvale Baptist Church in Madison, is under review. No charges have been filed.

"The DA's Office has received the referral from Madison Police Dept," the DA's office said in an email about Stine. "He is scheduled to appear for an Initial Appearance on 9/7/23 at 8:30 AM."

Police have investigated allegations Stine inappropriately touched children during a group visit to a state park in 2021, according to television station WISC in Madison. That investigation led the state's Department of Children and Families to revoke the license for Kid's Best Child Care, a day care run by Midvale Baptist, in late June.

"The Department has received credible information that licensee Robert Stine is the subject of an investigation, which has resulted in referral to the Dane County District Attorney's office for criminal charges of sexual abuse of a child," said a letter from the Department of Children and Families to the church, posted online by WICS.

"The Department has concluded that these findings substantially relate to the care of children and have created a condition that directly threatens the health, safety, and welfare of children in care."

The church's day care facility reportedly was shut down in April. Neither Stine nor his attorney responded to a request for comment.

According to his bio on Midvale's website, Stine is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and has been pastor since 2007. He is also a former leader of the Baptist Student Union at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Despite the investigation, Stine's bio remains on the church website, and the television station reported that he has continued to preach at the church, though videos of recent services were recently reportedly removed from the church's YouTube page.

Stine had been president of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention until May, when he resigned because of the police investigation, said Leo Endel, the convention's executive director.

Endel said the convention is cooperating with the investigative process and had been waiting to see if Stine would be charged with a crime. Now that the investigation is public, Engel said that the convention's board is being notified.

Endel said that he'd also notified a consultant who is helping the convention address sexual abuse in church as well as the Southern Baptist Convention's credentials committee.

"Our practice has been that as soon as charges are filed or there is public news, we get the word out among our people to try to prevent any other future incidents," he said.

State conventions affiliated with the SBC are working to upgrade their process to address abuse, Endel said. The SBC passed a series of reforms in 2022 aimed at addressing the issue of sexual abuse, including setting up a

“Ministry Check” website that will track abuse by pastors and creating a toolkit of resources for preventing abuse. The SBC has also expelled churches that have mishandled abuse allegations.

A 2019 investigation by the *Houston Chronicle* and *San Antonio Express-News* found hundreds of abuse cases in SBC churches over several decades. A 2022 report from Guidepost Solutions found SBC leaders had spent years trying to downplay the scope of abuse in the 13 million-member convention and had mistreated abuse survivors for years.

At their 2023 annual meeting, Southern Baptists reauthorized a task force that is implementing the abuse reforms.