

Hunt lawsuit delayed, Sills trial set for 2026

November 5, 2024

NASHVILLE (BP)—A defamation trial involving the Southern Baptist Convention that was supposed to begin next week has been delayed indefinitely, while another is set for 2026.

Johnny M. Hunt v. Southern Baptist Convention, et. al., has been ongoing since March 2023, when former SBC president [Johnny Hunt sued the SBC](#), the SBC Executive Committee and Guidepost Solutions for defamation



Johnny Hunt, a longtime megachurch pastor in Georgia, was named in the Guidepost Solutions report on sexual abuse in the SBC, which alleged Hunt had sexually assaulted another pastor's wife in 2010. Guidepost, a third-party investigation firm, found the claims credible. (BP File Photo)

Hunt claimed Guidepost and the other parties used him as a “scapegoat” in

an investigation of alleged mishandling of sexual abuse claims by the SBC Executive Committee.

Parties [failed to reach a settlement in September](#), and the case had been scheduled to go to trial Nov. 12.

But in a [court-sponsored teleconference](#) Oct. 31, the parties agreed to meet “after the beginning of May 2025” to “confer about trial dates.” At issue is a disagreement over whether to reopen discovery in the case.

The May 2022 report from Guidepost’s investigation included allegations from an unidentified woman who claims Hunt sexually abused her in 2010, shortly after his two-year stint as SBC president.

Hunt [resigned from his position](#) as senior vice president of evangelism at the North American Mission Board, a position he’d held since 2018, days before the Guidepost report became public.

The lawsuit has been a major contributor to the [dire financial situation](#) of the SBC Executive Committee, which has spent more than \$12 million in three years on legal fees.

The contract governing Guidepost’s initial investigation stipulates Guidepost would have indemnity in any lawsuit resulting from the investigation, and the Executive Committee would foot its legal bills.

Sills suit set to go to jury in February 2026

The other trial—former Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor David Sills’ defamation lawsuit against the SBC—will go before a jury Feb. 10, 2026, in Nashville.



David Sills

An order from Chief U.S. District Judge William L. Campbell Jr. [announced that counsel](#) for all parties will meet on Feb. 2, 2026, for a pretrial conference to discuss the case's undisputed facts, expert witnesses, proposed testimony, jury instruction and other issues. Campbell is the same judge presiding over the lawsuit Hunt filed against the SBC.

[Sills filed suit](#) in November 2022 alleging "defamation, conspiracy, intentional infliction of emotional distress, negligence, and wantonness concerning untrue claims of sexual abuse."

Sills carried on a long-term sexual relationship with a former student, Jennifer Lyell. Lyell alleges the relationship was abusive. Sills claims it was consensual.

Sills was named in a May 2022 report from Guidepost Solutions based on its investigation of alleged mishandling of sexual abuse claims by the SBC Executive Committee.

Guidepost is also [named as a defendant](#) in the suit, as are Lyell, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and its president Al Mohler, former SBC presidents Ed Litton and Bart Barber, and former SBC Executive Committee representatives Willie McLaurin and Rolland Slade.