

SBC added as defendant in Pressler lawsuit

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HOUSTON (BP)—The Southern Baptist Convention has been added as a co-defendant in a lawsuit accusing retired Texas state judge Paul Pressler of sexual abuse.

A Jan. 12 amendment to a [suit](#) originally filed last October claims the SBC, among other defendants, had a “duty to exercise reasonable care so as to control” Pressler, who helped engineer what its proponents call the “conservative resurgence” within the convention.

Pressler denies the allegations by plaintiff Gareld Duane Rollins, who claimed Pressler sexually abused him repeatedly between the late 1970s, when Rollins was 14, and 2004.

Rollins’ petition, filed in Texas state district court, alleges he was enrolled in a young adult Bible study which Pressler led at First Baptist Church in Houston and later served as Pressler’s office assistant.

Pressler, 87, was a justice on the Court of Appeals of Texas, 14th District, and a member of the Texas state legislature. He also served the SBC in various volunteer capacities.

Other defendants in the lawsuit—all of whom have denied Rollins’ allegations that they facilitated and concealed the abuse—include Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, its president Paige Patterson, Pressler’s wife Nancy, First Baptist Church in Houston, Pressler’s former law partner Jared Woodfill and the Woodfill Law Firm.

The suit demands more than \$1 million in relief from the defendants

collectively, claiming the alleged abuse contributed to Rollins' life of substance abuse and crime.

The suit alleges the SBC:

- Made "minors sexually available to Pressler."
- "Fraudulently misrepresented and continued to misrepresent material facts concerning the safety of children" at cooperating churches.
- "Had actual or constructive knowledge" of Pressler's alleged conduct and "concealed" it.
- Continues, with others, "to assist Pressler through obstruction of justice."

In other developments, Pressler filed a Dec. 21 motion asking Harris County district judge R.K. Sandill to dismiss Rollins' suit because the statute of limitations expired on its claims of abuse, the last of which allegedly occurred more than a decade ago.

A hearing on that motion is scheduled Feb. 23.

Southwestern Seminary and Patterson filed a motion to separate themselves from other defendants and move the case against them to Tarrant County, where the seminary is located. A hearing on those motions was canceled Jan. 17 and has yet to be rescheduled, according to the Harris County District Court.