

SBC to create sexual abuse response department

September 18, 2024

NASHVILLE (BP)—Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee trustees on Sept. 17 approved a recommendation to create a department within the Executive Committee to assist churches in the area of sexual abuse prevention and response.

Messengers voted at the [2024 SBC annual meeting](#) in June for the Executive Committee to find a permanent home for sexual abuse prevention and response efforts in the SBC.

Executive Committee President and CEO Jeff Iorg began conversations with leaders in the Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force shortly after being nominated to his position. By the time of his election in May, those talks had been taking place for weeks.

“We have had two task forces that have done difficult and hard work,” he told the Executive Committee. “But it’s time to stop talking about what we’re going to do and take an initial, strategic step of action that puts into place an administrative response to this issue.”

As Iorg began his role, he said, the implementation task force decided to recommend to the SBC that the Executive Committee take the lead in identifying the best place within the Southern Baptist structure to address ongoing sexual abuse prevention and response. The real work for that goal began after messengers approved the recommendation.

Leaders considered placing the responsibility with an existing SBC entity or creating a new entity, Iorg said. The decision to create a new department in the Executive Committee was determined to be the best option “to get us

proactively started on implementing sexual abuse prevention and response across our denomination work,” Iorg said.

Send Relief gift to provide initial funds

Initial funding for the new department will be drawn from the remaining funds given by Send Relief in 2022 to go toward implementing sexual abuse reforms in the SBC. SBC Executive Committee CFO Mike Bianchi said about \$1.8 million remains of the initial \$3 million.

Iorg said an immediate step would be hiring a national director of sexual abuse prevention, who would recommend additional staff for the ministry.

Trustee Brian Cloys asked during open discussion why the role wasn’t given to the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, saying the entity seemed to be better suited for the role within its ministry assignment.

Iorg responded that prior to his becoming president, the Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force had held discussions with the ERLC. Both determined, Iorg said, “that it was not the most workable solution at the time.”

After becoming Executive Committee president, Iorg continued conversations with the ERLC on the matter.

“They are very open to helping us with this process and want to be a team member with us,” he told trustees. Currently, though, the Executive Committee is better suited for the role, he said.

Iorg went on to say, however, that different conditions in the future wouldn’t necessarily prevent the ERLC from taking on a more active role.

Cloys also asked about any connection between the announcement regarding the new department and the Abuse Response Commission, a new

organization announced at February's Executive Committee meeting.

"That organization was not authorized by the Southern Baptist Convention, doesn't belong to the Southern Baptist Convention and therefore we cannot give any responsibility to it as the Executive Committee," Iorg said. "It can only take its own responsibility in making its own decisions.

"That's not to criticize them, but to draw a distinction. [The Abuse Response Committee] does not belong to us, so we have no comment or directive that can be given by the Executive Committee of ARC."

Some flexibility will be necessary, he said.

"This is not the final step by any means, but it is the first step," Iorg said. "If we conclude as the months and years go by that this needs to be moved to another entity, it can be done. If we conclude it needs a separate entity, that can also be done.

"Things can still evolve out of this initial decision. But this decision starts us on a path—a concrete, specific action and is a workable solution, or at least the beginning point of one."