

# Settlement talks between SBC and Johnny Hunt fail

September 25, 2024

NASHVILLE (RNS)—Court-ordered mediation between a former Southern Baptist Convention president and lawyers for the nation's largest Protestant denomination failed last week, meaning the dispute between the two parties likely is headed to a trial in November.

Johnny Hunt, a former Georgia megachurch pastor and denominational official who served as SBC president from 2008 to 2010, [sued the denomination](#) in 2023, alleging defamation.

Hunt was named in the Guidepost report on abuse in the SBC for allegedly sexually assaulting another pastor's wife. He initially denied the incident and has since said it was consensual.

Lawyers for Hunt have claimed the former SBC president's misconduct was a private matter and the SBC ruined his reputation by making it public.

On Sept. 19, the two sides met for a court-ordered mediation, which ended in an impasse, according to a report filed Sept. 24 with the U.S. District Court of the Middle District of Tennessee.

The lawsuit has [cost the SBC's Executive Committee](#) about \$3 million in legal fees so far. Those legal fees, along with about \$9 million in fees related to the Guidepost report, led the Executive Committee to put its Nashville, Tenn., office building on the market.

Last week, current SBC President Clint Pressley tweeted that no settlement had been reached. The possibility of a settlement was raised during a recent Executive Committee meeting.

“Despite what you may be hearing, there is no settlement with Dr. Johnny Hunt,” Pressley tweeted on Thursday, the same day as the mediation.

The trial for the lawsuit is set to begin Nov. 12 in Nashville. Hunt’s lawyer recently petitioned the court to block the SBC from calling several witnesses, including Kevin Ezell, the president of the denomination’s North American Mission Board, at the trial.

After stepping down as pastor of First Baptist Church in Woodstock, Ga., Hunt served as a vice president at NAMB before resigning following the release of the Guidepost report in 2022.

No details of the settlement discussions were made public. However, earlier this year, lawyers for Hunt claimed more than \$75 million worth of damages.

Those damages, according to court documents filed in the case, include a loss of \$610,000 in annual income and benefits, a loss of \$360,000 a year in book sales, a loss of \$350,000 in speaking fees and an additional \$80,000 in other lost income, for a total of \$1.4 million a year. The lawyers also claim that Hunt intended to work for 11 years—or until he was 80—when the Guidepost report was published—for a total alleged loss of \$15.4 million. No supporting documents were included to substantiate those claimed losses.

The court filing also claims at least \$30 million in reputational harm and at least \$30 million in emotional distress

*EDITOR’S NOTE: After the article originally was posted on Sept. 25, Religion News Service updated it to include the last three paragraphs with details of the settlement claim filed by Hunt’s lawyers. This article was edited early morning on Sept. 26 to include those paragraphs.*