

# Sex abuse investigation costs top \$1.7 million

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NASHVILLE (BP)—The cost of the investigation into alleged mishandling of sexual abuse claims by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee has reached \$1.7 million since being commissioned last fall, according to invoice summaries provided to Baptist Press.

The budget provided by Guidepost Solutions, the firm contracted to conduct the investigation, originally projected the investigation to cost between \$1.3 million and \$1.6 million.

Guidepost sends invoices to the Sexual Abuse Task Force commissioned by Southern Baptist messengers at the 2021 SBC annual meeting. That documentation is then passed to the SBC Executive Committee. From October 2021 through February, those invoices totaled \$1,743,121.



Pastor Grant Gaines presented a motion calling for a task force to oversee a third-party investigation into allegations of mishandled abuse claims at the SBC Executive Committee. (RNS Photo / Kit Doyle)

Willie McLaurin, interim Executive Committee president and CEO, said those expenditures reflect the wishes of Southern Baptists regarding the investigation.

“The final authority and final accountability for how funds are spent is

given by the messengers and the convention,” he said. “Southern Baptists can be confident that while the investigation focused on the Executive Committee, the EC has diligently fulfilled the request of the messengers by funding the investigation. I am incredibly thankful that for such a time as this, reserve funds were available to use without having impact on our cooperative work.”

The reserve funds McLaurin referenced are generated from gifts allocated through the Cooperative Program to the Executive Committee. Those reserves have been built over the years through investments and as of February stood at \$15 million, with \$12.2 million in unrestricted funds. An update on the status of the reserved funds will be given at next week’s [called Executive Committee meeting](#).

In their September 2021 meeting, Executive Committee trustees originally voted to allocate up to \$1.6 million for the investigation. At their February gathering, members approved a recommendation that increased that figure to \$2 million. Legal fees originally were approved for \$500,000 but also increased in February to \$ 2 million in a unanimous vote.

Bruce Frank, pastor of Biltmore Church in Arden, N.C., and chair of the Sexual Abuse Task Force, commended Guidepost’s work and thanked them for a \$458,154 credit to the February invoice.

“I am very grateful for the immense professionalism shown by Guidepost in dealing with a condensed time frame—due to EC delays—and a large project,” he said. “We are also grateful for the professional courtesy discount given by Guidepost due to this project’s importance.”

Archie Mason, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Ark., and chair of the Executive Committee’s committee on convention finances and stewardship development, pointed out to fellow trustees in February that while the Guidepost report will be released prior to the 2022 SBC annual

meeting in Anaheim, bills connected to it and legal fees will continue to be collected throughout the summer.

## **‘We want this to be done the right way’**

The Executive Committee’s February motion calling for an increased allocation for the investigation was expected to cover those projections. If not, the recommendation allowed for additional direct expenses to be covered without further approval.

“I don’t know about you, but I think we’d all agree—we want this to be done the right way,” Mason said at the February meeting. “Reach the right conclusion. Deal with what we’ve got to deal with. Turn over the rocks. Let’s get it right.”

SBC President Ed Litton appointed the Task Force to oversee an independent, third-party review, per the motion brought forward and approved by messengers.

“When Southern Baptists voted overwhelmingly in Nashville to authorize this investigation, their will was unmistakable,” said Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala. “Our convention sent one loud and clear message: sexual abuse is something we cannot afford to get wrong.

“This process has been difficult and costly, but these obstacles do not compare to the devastation and pain wrought by sexual abuse. I am grateful that in recent months our Executive Committee staff and trustees have acted decisively to support this investigation. I would ask all Southern Baptists to continue to pray, not only for this process, but for the recommendations and reforms it will yield.”