

Baylor regents receive briefing from Pepper Hamilton on sexual violence report

May 13, 2016

WACO—Baylor University’s board of regents received a “comprehensive briefing” from Pepper Hamilton, the Philadelphia law firm regents retained last September to investigate Baylor’s response to reports of sexual violence.

“Over the coming weeks, the board will carefully consider the information provided in the briefing and determine how to decisively act upon Pepper Hamilton’s findings and recommendations,” a May 13 [statement](#) issued by the university said. “The members of the board will be guided by their faith as they make significant decisions for the welfare of Baylor students, the direction of the institution and the good of Baylor Nation.”

Richard Willis, chair of the board pointed to the importance of the decisions facing the board.

“These deliberations are vital as we seek to preserve and reinforce trust in Baylor University,” Willis said. “Thoroughly understanding the findings and acting on the recommendations to ensure the safety of all students are the board’s highest priority.”

Response to Ukwuachu situation

The [regents hired](#) Pepper Hamilton to conduct an independent external investigation soon after Sam Ukwuachu, a former Baylor Bears football player, was convicted and received a 180-day jail sentence and 10 years’ probation for sexual assault.

The assault, reported by a then-18-year-old soccer player, occurred in October 2013—about five months after Ukwuachu transferred to Baylor from Boise State, where he had been dropped from the football team after an earlier act of violence involving a female student.

In February, ESPN televised an “Outside the Lines” [report](#) about allegations against another former Baylor Bears player, Tevin Elliott. ESPN reported five women asserted Elliott sexually assaulted them between October 2009 and April 2012. Elliott was convicted of two counts of sexual assault two years ago. But the “Outside the Lines” report asserted Baylor officials failed to investigate adequately the allegations of sexual violence.

Candlelight vigil and open letter

In response, about 250 Baylor students, faculty, staff, alumni and others staged a Feb. 8 [candlelight vigil](#) in front of the home of Baylor President Ken Starr.

At the same time, more than 1,700 people signed an [online open letter](#) that asserted the “pattern of response (to reports of sexual violence) does not represent the distinct Christian identity on which Baylor prides itself, nor does it keep Baylor students, faculty and staff safe.”

The next day, Starr—who was not present at the candlelight vigil or the prayer service that followed in Powell Chapel at Baylor’s Truett Theological Seminary—issued a public statement: “We hear your voices loud and clear. You want us to continue to improve. And you want definitive, responsible actions after we receive the insights and recommendations from Pepper Hamilton (the law firm that is conducting an investigation for Baylor). You have my word on both.”

In March, Baylor [announced](#) it would increase Title IX staff and resources, expand its counseling center and enhance public safety. Title IX is the law governing universities that prohibits discrimination based on sex and deals

with issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

At that time, Starr announced he would work with Willis to establish a multi-disciplinary task force to act promptly on recommendations from the Pepper Hamilton review.