

# Firm said it had ‘smoking gun’ documents in Pressler suit

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The legal firm that pursued a sexual abuse lawsuit against Paul Pressler said it discovered “smoking gun documents” that would have proved their client’s case.

Baker Botts, the firm that represented Duane Rollins, also said it lined up witnesses and alleged victims who would have testified against Pressler, who has continued to deny any wrongdoing.

An article published on the [law.com](#) website also asserts lawyers for the Southern Baptist Convention were slow to surrender documents to Baker Botts.

The [law.com](#) article stated the Baker Botts legal team devoted \$6 million in billable hours to the suit. It resulted in a series of confidential settlements with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Houston attorney and conservative activist Jered Woodfill, First Baptist Church in Houston, the SBC, the SBC Executive Committee and—finally—Pressler, one of the architects of the so-called “conservative resurgence” in the SBC.

Court documents filed by Baker Botts claimed the defendants knew “Pressler abused Rollins and other boys and have deliberately concealed that information for their own self-interest.”

The [law.com](#) article asserted the SBC used delaying tactics and withheld requested documents.

“During discovery, Baker Botts sent its requests for production but the Southern Baptist Convention produced zero documents. Baker Botts

pushed on a motion to compel and SBC responded saying it was not producing documents because they were under the control of their executive committee,” the article stated.

“As a result, Baker Botts brought the executive committee into the lawsuit and one week before trial it produced about 1.5 million documents. Baker Botts moved for a continuance and put a whole team of associates on the document search.”

When contacted by the *Baptist Standard*, officials at the SBC Executive Committee offered no additional comment beyond the public statement released at the time the settlement of the suit was announced:

“The Southern Baptist Convention and the SBC Executive Committee, Defendants in *Rollins v, Pressler*, entered into a confidential settlement agreement with the Plaintiff. The Southern Baptist Convention and its Executive Committee were each fully prepared to proceed to trial.

“However, several factors ultimately made settlement the more prudent choice. Chief among those factors was the horrendous nature of the abuse allegations, the likelihood that counsel for the SBC and Executive Committee would have to confront and cross-examine abuse survivors, the Executive Committee’s current financial condition, and the willingness of multiple insurance carriers to contribute to the terms of the settlement.”

## **‘Turned a blind eye’ to abuse accusations**

In the [law.com](#) article, Michael Goldberg, senior counsel in the Houston office of Baker Botts, credited his colleagues for “finding the smoking gun documents” and “convincing other victims to testify.”

“Among the more incriminating documents were those of SBC lawyers

stating that the defendants would not depose Baker Botts' witnesses because they believed it would only prove up the plaintiff's case," the article stated.

"Other documents spelled out the SBC defense philosophy of delay, filing a multitude of motions and blaming the victim."

Rollins claimed Pressler "used his religious authority and status to groom and begin a sexually abusive relationship" with him when he was in middle school and continued the abuse for years, a charge Pressler and his attorneys repeatedly denied.

"Pressler's pattern of abuse unfolded while he acted with the authority and power of his position in the SBC, and while the Defendants turned a blind eye to his abuse. This tragic cycle continued for decades," the amended petition filed in July 2023 with the 127th Judicial District Court of Harris County stated.

The amended petition asserts the defendants "buried the evidence and abused the legal system." It names seven individuals who reported they were abused by Pressler as young men.

Baker Botts asserted it had several witnesses lined up to testify against Pressler. The [law.com](#) article specifically mentioned a former assistant to Pressler, who "told the Pressler family about the sexual abuse he witnessed," and a former associate in Pressler's law firm, who said he was "propositioned" by Pressler.

"Several witnesses, including a current Southern Baptist pastor, a prosecuting attorney and a sitting judge, were willing to come forward to testify about Judge Pressler's abuse and the cover-up," the article stated.

Baker Botts reported District Judge Jaclanel McFarland was willing to testify that "it was common knowledge Pressler acted inappropriately with

young men.” The article noted McFarland presides in the court where Pressler once served.

“So upset was McFarland with Pressler’s legacy that she had his courtroom portrait taken down,” the article stated.

McFarland is a former vice president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and former Baylor University regent.

*EDITOR’S NOTE: When initially posted, the 9th paragraph of the article stated SBC Executive Committee officials did not respond to a request for comment. Later, an SBC Executive Committee spokesperson contacted the Baptist Standard to say the agency had no further comment beyond the initial statement released at the time the legal settlement was announced in December. The article was edited to reflect that and to include the earlier public statement.*