

Sutherland Springs shooting survivors awarded \$230 million

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SAN ANTONIO (BP)—A federal district judge ordered the U.S. government to pay more than \$230 million to survivors of the 2017 mass shooting of 26 worshippers at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs.

U.S. District Judge Xavier Rodriguez of the Western District of Texas awarded the damages Feb. 7 to survivors and heirs of survivors of the Nov. 5, 2017, church shooting, months after determining that the U.S. government was 60 percent liable for the massacre.

Rodriguez levied blame in a July 2021 ruling that the U.S. Air Force had failed to report to the FBI shooter Devin Kelley's bad conduct discharge in 2014. Two years earlier, Kelley had been convicted of assaulting his wife and stepson. Kelley was able to purchase the rifle used in the shooting because his name was not in a database that would have disqualified the purchase, Rodriguez said in the ruling last year. Rodriguez deemed Kelley 40 percent responsible for the crime.

Rodriguez awarded the 55 plaintiffs individual damages in the ruling, some as high as \$10 million or more, according to court documents.

First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs Senior Pastor Frank Pomeroy, who lost a daughter in the attack, has chosen not to comment on the court case out of respect for the victims. Pomeroy is not listed among plaintiffs.

Nation's deadliest church shooting

Kelley shot himself in the head after a police chase after he had

methodically walked through the church indiscriminately shooting people. It is considered the deadliest mass shooting in Texas history and the deadliest church shooting in the nation.

Kelley reportedly used a Model 8500 Ruger AR-556 fitted with a 30-round magazine in the attack. In June 2021, the Texas Supreme Court ruled that the Academy Sports and Outdoors store that sold Kelley the rifle could not be held liable because Kelley's name was not in the proper database.

Today, the church worships in a new facility dedicated in 2019. The North American Mission Board funded the construction with financial gifts received and partnerships with dozens of companies that donated \$1.5 million in materials and services to the project.

First Sutherland Springs voted in August 2021 to demolish the church building where the shooting occurred, replacing the site with an open-air memorial to the victims. Pomeroy long proposed a memorial garden at the site.