

Texas Baptist leaders call for legislative review of policing

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WACO—About 250 Texas Baptist pastors and Christian leaders have endorsed a call for Texas lawmakers to make sure police training and practices prohibit the use of excessive force.



Joel Gregory

Joel Gregory, professor of preaching at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary, initiated the [statement on social justice in policing](#), which specifically notes "the use of unnecessary force in encounters with African Americans."

In part, the statement urges the Texas Legislature in its 2021 session "to review and as necessary legislate consistent policies binding on all law enforcement entities under its legislative oversight to prohibit the excessive use of force in police policies, especially the use of choke holds, that police be so trained, and that police be required by legislative law to report peers who use such abusive practices."

Joining Gregory, who holds the George W. Truett Endowed Chair of Preaching and Evangelism at Truett Seminary, as initial signatories are: Howie Batson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Amarillo; Les Hollon, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio; Matt Snowden, pastor of

First Baptist Church in Waco; Todd Still, dean of Truett Seminary; Jeff Warren, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas; Steve Wells, pastor of South Main Baptist Church in Houston; and Dennis Wiles, pastor of First Baptist Church in Arlington.

Broad-based support

More than 240 additional ministers and Christian leaders had signed the statement as of July 2. They include David Hardage, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and BGCT President Michael Evans, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield.

Others who have endorsed the statement include Jon Singletary, dean of the Diana Garland School of Social Work at Baylor; Stephen Stookey, dean of the School of Christian Studies at Wayland Baptist University; Marv Knox, coordinator of Fellowship Southwest; Rick McClatchy, field coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Texas; and Eric Black, editor and publisher of the *Baptist Standard*.

Most pastors who endorsed the document lead churches affiliated with the BGCT, but some also are dually aligned with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. At the national level, some of the churches are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and others support the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. A few individuals outside of Texas and a few non-Baptists also signed the document.

‘Wish to see change’

The statement begins by affirming “that most law officers in Texas are well intentioned, trained professionals who seek to do all in their power to treat persons fairly and with equal justice, risking their lives daily to do so.”

It ends similarly, with an expression of “respect for and confidence in those thousands of police officers who daily act justly, fairly and humanely in the discharge of their duties.”

At the same time, the statement asserts social justice requires legislative review of policing practices.

“We express our concern that urgent and widely known social justice concerns call for a Texas legislative review of police training and practices, especially the use of unnecessary force in encounters with African Americans,” the statement reads.

“We acknowledge that the death of George Floyd has focused the attention of all informed persons of good will on this singular issue. Indeed, it has created an unprecedented focus on this problem that calls for both religious and government leaders to attend to the matter with renewed urgency.

“We observe that the members of our own congregations have expressed their intense individual concern in unprecedented numbers and with unmatched intensity. They wish us to address this issue both in pulpit and in practice. In heretofore unsurpassed numbers they wish to see change.”

Read the entire statement [here](#). The fourth paragraph of the article was edited after it initially was posted to add one name that accidentally had been omitted from the listing of original endorsers.