

# Texas Supreme Court allows lawsuit against Pressler to proceed

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The Texas Supreme Court ruled a sexual abuse lawsuit against Paul Pressler—one of the architects of the self-described “conservative resurgence” in the Southern Baptist Convention—may proceed.

The *Houston Chronicle* first reported the April 1 ruling, in which the state Supreme Court denied a petition for review. In February 2021, a [Texas appellate court ruled](#) a previously dismissed case against Pressler could resume. Pressler appealed that decision to the state Supreme Court three months later.



Paul Pressler (right) is depicted in a stained glass window that has been removed from

Southwestern Baptist  
Theological Seminary.  
(RNS Photo courtesy of  
Don Young Glass Studio)

Pressler—a former SBC first vice president, former SBC Executive Committee member, and former Texas legislator and judge—is being sued by Gerald Duane Rollins.

Alongside Paige Patterson—who was fired as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2018 for mishandling abuse claims—Pressler orchestrated what supporters called the “conservative resurgence” and opponents termed the “fundamentalist takeover” of the SBC, beginning in 1979.

In the suit originally filed in October 2017, Rollins alleges Pressler raped him in 1980, when Rollins was 14 years old and attending a Bible study Pressler taught at First Baptist Church in Houston.

According to the affidavit, Pressler continued to sexually abuse Rollins, “over the course of the next 24 years or so” as Rollins progressed into his 30s.

Rollins said he worked from 2003 to 2004 as an assistant to Pressler at Pressler’s home office. After a 2003 altercation in a Dallas hotel room between the two men, Rollins sued Pressler for assault. That case was settled when Pressler agreed to pay Rollins \$1,500 per month and Rollins agreed to keep the suit and altercation confidential.

Rollins asserted the abuse he suffered sent him into a life of addiction, alcoholism and incarceration. He maintains while in prison in November 2015, psychiatric counseling led him to realize for the first time that his relationship with Pressler was not consensual. Thus, the five-year statute of

limitations should not have begun until that point.

His attorneys agreed, saying Rollins was of “unsound mind” to make the allegations until 2015. In the affidavit, Harvey A. Rosenstock, Rollins’ prison psychiatrist, said the alleged abuse had “cause[d] these overwhelmingly painful memories to be defensively repressed and disassociated.”

In its February 2021 decision, the Court of Appeals for the First District of Texas agreed with Rollins that post-traumatic stress disorder had played a role in his ability to discern the abuse. Rollins furthermore alleged that Pressler told him the sexual abuse was “divinely sanctioned but needed to be kept secret because only God would understand it.”

Pressler and his attorneys have denied all allegations of wrongdoing. They also claim Rollins lacks standing to file claims against Pressler because of the time that has passed since the alleged offenses. Pressler is now in his 90s.

Future court dates in the Harris County District Court have not been set.

*Based on a Baptist Press article by Brandon Porter, with additional information from the Houston Chronicle, Religion News Service and the Baptist Standard.*