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Dear Texas Legislator,

We are members of the Texas Ethics & Religious Liberty Committee (TERLC) of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC), a non-partisan confessional fellowship based on a partnership with likeminded congregations in cooperative ministry. We currently have 2,709 Texas churches affiliated with our convention. Our committee engages in public policy to influence every legislative session, seeking to educate, resource, and mobilize the churches toward active involvement.

We believe all citizens have the right and responsibility to participate in local, state, and national elections to use their influence to affect change, and we are resolved to pray for you and all our elected officials.

We believe every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. More than ever, these are principles greatly needed in our state and nation.

On behalf of the churches, as you enter the 88th Legislative Session, we ask you to include the following legislative priorities: Religious Liberty, Sanctity of Life and Orphan Care, Gender Identity, the Family, Education of Children and Parental Rights, Sex-Trafficking, Pornography, Sexual Abuse, Gambling, and Economic Freedom. These priorities are in accordance with our doctrinal statement, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and various resolutions for which we will advocate. They are vitally important to thousands of churches across the Lone Star State.

#### **I. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

Religious liberty is a basic human right discerned from Scripture and an essential component of a free society as affirmed by the founders of our nation

It is imperative that our state and local governments 1) embrace religious liberty as a basic and essential human right; 2) continue vigorous support of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and our deeply held religious beliefs and God-given conscience, including the rights of students, teachers, and coaches to pray in public schools; and 3) resist, object to, and defeat any social or political agenda which seeks to foster an aggressive secularization in the marketplace that is hostile to or discriminatory toward the free exercise of American citizens to express their religious convictions in public places.

#### **We call upon our elected officials to:**

1. Pass Medical Right of Conscience to protect health care providers' right to object to participation in a medical procedure that violates his or her ethical, moral, or religious beliefs.



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2. Prohibit the State Bar of Texas from adopting or imposing a rule that forces a person to choose between practicing law or freely expressing his or her religious beliefs and associating with whom he or she chooses.
3. In the 87th Legislative Session, we were grateful for the passage of SB 797 and HCR 1. As a granite monument of the Ten Commandments is displayed on the Capitol grounds, we also seek that the Ten Commandments monuments be returned to our schools and government buildings. Our founding fathers held these commandments to be the foundation of civil law, and the Holy Bible and its principles and doctrines are the foundation upon which our nation and its government were built.
4. Prohibit local municipalities from adopting and enforcing ordinances that violate or restrict religious liberty.

## **II. SANCTITY OF LIFE AND ORPHAN CARE**

The SBTC has always advocated in favor of laws that protect the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death. All human life, born and unborn, deserves equal dignity and rights; whether young, old, ill, disabled, or mentally/physically impaired, each life deserves full protection and honor as a human being.

Holy Scripture states that the very soul of an individual exists in the womb beginning at conception (Psalm 139:13-14, Jeremiah 1:5). We believe we must speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death (Proverbs 31:8-9, Psalm 72:12-14).

We are also advocates for the care of foster children, the adoption of orphaned children, and care of the elderly and disabled (James 1:27). We seek policies and legislation that assist and incentivize the adoption of orphaned children, encourage more faith-based programs for children in foster care, and adequately care for the basic needs of elderly and disabled individuals who are a valued part of God's creation.

The Bible teaches that all people were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and were designed for a special purpose (Psalm 139:16, Ephesians 2:10). The Declaration of Independence affirms the "inalienable" right to life as being endowed by the Creator.

### **We call upon our elected officials to:**

1. Pass a Resolution for the month of June to formally be called the "Celebration of Life Month," in remembrance of the Supreme Court of the United States on June 24, 2022, overturning *Roe v. Wade*, one of the most horrific decisions in



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American history, that is responsible for over 60 million deaths of innocent children.

2. Provide for enforcement of our laws to protect life when abortionists and district attorneys refuse to follow current laws.
3. Ensure women and families have the resources to choose life, including adoption.
4. Ensure employee benefits do not include payment for abortion-related services.
5. Repeal the 10-Day Rule that allows a hospital to unilaterally authorize the withdrawing or withholding of life-sustaining treatment based on “quality of life” judgments instead of medical determinations, even when the patient and family are directly opposed to the decision.
6. Pass legislation that restricts the delivery of chemical abortifacients to Texas homes and businesses and holds accountable companies which do so.

### **III. GENDER IDENTITY**

We encourage government officials and policy makers to support public policies that recognize the unalterable God-given distinctions between male and female and especially protect children under the age of 18 from surgical procedures or pharmaceuticals that are for the purpose of gender transitioning or gender reassignment.

Some states and courts are allowing children to determine their sexual and gender identity, regardless of the parent’s beliefs, as ordered in the 2020 Younger case in Texas. We affirm that gender is determined by God alone and is not influenced by man or open for selection or alteration. We further affirm that God has designed two genders, male and female, as part of His original creation design and assigns one to each human He creates (Genesis 1:27).

#### **We call upon our elected officials to:**

1. Ban any method of gender modification of children such as body altering surgeries, genital mutilation, chemical castration, puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, psychological and social gender transitioning.
2. Ensure the rights of parents to be involved in conversations at school concerning the gender identity or gender transformation of their children.



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3. Protect and defend the privacy of women and children in intimate facilities such as locker rooms, restrooms, dressing rooms, and shelters by maintaining distinct and separate facilities based upon biological sex.
4. Save women's collegiate sports and protect athletic opportunities and fair competition for women by ensuring that only biologically female athletes compete in women's sports.
5. Ban any taxpayer funds from being used for treatments or surgeries to alter a person's biological sex.

#### **IV. THE FAMILY, EDUCATION OF CHILDREN, AND PARENTAL RIGHTS**

We call upon the legislature to protect parental rights and to reject all attempts that threaten these freedoms, especially in the areas of religious beliefs, education, and medical and/or psychological evaluations and procedures. As parents, we also have the fundamental right to hold accountable schools, institutions, and industries for their moral influence on our children.

We believe that Scripture's definition of the family, the traditional biblical view of marriage, and the need for children to have a mother and a father represent the bedrock of society and the foundation of a healthy, well-functioning civilization (Ephesians 5:22-32).

Scripture also instructs parents to ensure the godly education of their children. Whether in public, private, or home schools, parents must have the freedom to exercise their parental authority to make the choice that is best for their family. This includes the right to demand discontinuation of offensive sex-education materials and programs that undermine parental rights and the traditional biblical family.

#### **We call upon our elected officials to:**

1. Include enforcement penalties to hold school districts accountable to follow Texas law and the Texas and United States Constitution and to provide legal remedies for parents when their parental rights are violated.
2. Establish full transparency between schools and parents concerning curriculum, all instructional materials, online learning, school policies, surveys, evaluations, discussions, and all matters regarding their child.
3. Repeal the Obscenity Exemption in the Texas Penal Code which allows children to have access to pornographic, harmful, and explicit materials under the appearance of education.



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4. Require schools and libraries to filter pornographic, inappropriate, and harmful content for minors and ban adult entertainment of any kind including Drag Queen story times.
5. Unless directly related to academic grades being recorded, it should be illegal for school districts to collect, analyze, store, and sell data on students and/or their families.

#### **V. SEX TRAFFICKING, PORNOGRAPHY, AND SEXUAL ABUSE**

We condemn all forms of sexual violence which includes, but is not limited to, any form of sexual assault, harassment, exploitation, or abuse. These criminal and unjust acts leave lasting physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harm to survivors and victims.

God hates violence against the weak and defenseless and calls his people to defend the hurt and oppressed (Psalm 82:4), to stand for justice (Psalm 82:3, Proverbs 31:8–9), and to deliver victims of abuse from the hands of their oppressors (Proverbs 6:17, 24:10–12).

The sex-trafficking industry is modern-day slavery. It is imperative to be proactive in prevention and increasing awareness of 1) the recruiting methods of criminals; 2) the best policies for crime prevention, reporting, protection of vulnerable children, and prosecution of the perpetrators; and 3) victim resources and support.

Pornography objectifies and dehumanizes individuals made in the image of God. Additionally, the ever-expanding pornography industry and online activity of perpetrators who pursue minors and seek young children for its lucrative films, videos, and printed materials drives the demand for child sexual exploitation.

#### **We call upon our elected officials to:**

1. Continue strengthening our laws to foster prevention and awareness and bring perpetrators to justice.
2. Pursue legislation that restricts all forms of pornography. Require social media platforms and other websites displaying explicit or pornographic content, or facilitating interaction of a sexual nature, to utilize age verification technology to prevent minor access and block porn content to minors.
3. Secure our southern border to stop the alarming increase of human trafficking.

#### **VI. GAMBLING**

The devastating impact and social costs of state-sanctioned predatory gambling has already been well documented such as the high costs of crime, bankruptcies, business



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and unemployment costs, addiction and treatment costs, family costs of divorce, child abuse, neglect and domestic violence, sex-trafficking, regulatory costs related to government oversight, and suicides (multiple studies show problem gamblers have the highest suicide rate of any addiction) (Matthew 12:33).

Gambling is the attempt to meet one's needs through chance while Scripture encourages us to build resources through labor. Gambling further burdens those already in financial difficulty, and preys on the poor (Proverbs 13:11,15:27, 21:5, 22:16, 28:6, 1 Timothy 6:6-10).

**We call upon our elected officials to:**

1. Oppose any expansion of state-sanctioned, predatory gambling in Texas.
2. Reject any state budget that relies on monies from gambling to fund legitimate state responsibilities.
3. Oppose any constitutional amendment seeking to approve and legalize state-sanctioned, predatory gambling in Texas.
4. Oppose any legislation that would trigger Federal Class 3 gaming laws in Texas.

**VII. ECONOMIC FREEDOM**

We call upon the 88th Texas Legislature to exercise fiscal responsibility and to consider as essential the freedom to work and earn an income free from oppressive regulations, high tax rates, and lockdowns (Nehemiah 5:4, Proverbs 22:7).

The harsh realities of financial hardship, unemployment, and indebtedness lead to the downfall of many marriages and families. We implore you to make the preservation of the family unit a top priority as you lead public policy efforts in financial stewardship of state monies.

**We call upon our elected officials to:**

1. Make the elimination of high property taxes a priority, especially considering that Texas has a multibillion-dollar surplus, inflation has recently hit a 40-year high, the cost of living has risen rapidly with no federal or state tax relief, and Texas has the sixth highest property tax in the nation.

Proverbs 13:34 teaches, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." May all that you do seek to glorify God and leave a legacy of bold leadership, righteousness, and courage in our state. Thank you for your service to the great state of Texas. We commit to pray for you and the entire 88th Legislature, and to encourage the



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churches to pray for and encourage you as well, as you seek the wisdom of God in the liberal promotion of what is good and the uncompromising restriction of what is evil.

We will continue to communicate throughout the 88th Legislative Session. Please feel free to contact us for further discussion and for prayer.

God bless you,

John Aaron Matthew, Chairman  
Cindy Asmussen, SBTC Public Policy Advisor  
Tony Wolfe, SBTC Associate Executive Director  
(on behalf of the SBTC Texas Ethics and Religious Liberty Committee)