

Illinois Baptist State Association Response to SBC Sex Abuse Task Force Recommendations for Baptist State Conventions

(June 9, 2022)

The Illinois Baptist State Association is active in training and equipping its member churches in the prevention of sexual abuse. IBSA has also worked to help churches, local associations, and its own staff be ready to respond to any instances of reported abuse in ways that properly care for survivors while ensuring careful communication, investigation, and ministry.

While messengers at IBSA's 2021 annual meeting did not present a motion requesting an Illinois Sexual Abuse Task Force (SATF), IBSA proactively chose to form a team in early 2022 to review its own practices and to consider additional steps. The IBSA SATF plans to work with the SBC SATF and others to continue identifying best practices in sexual abuse prevention and response, both for IBSA staff and for IBSA member churches and associations.

Leaders of the IBSA SATF were present in Nashville in April, when the SBC SATF convened state Baptist Convention leaders for the purpose of previewing their work in anticipation of May's formal report by the SBC SATF. Illinois representatives to this meeting were encouraged by the work of the SBC SATF and felt that the state convention recommendations previewed at this meeting were consistent with the current work of the IBSA SATF.

The following (in bold paragraphs below) are the requests from the SBC SATF's report that relate specifically to Baptist state conventions, along with specific responses on behalf of IBSA:

#1: We request that state conventions consider having a designated, trained staff person or independent contractor to receive calls regarding allegations of sexual abuse and provide initial guidance. We request this person be trained in trauma to be able to assist both survivors and churches and will be able to assist submitters who may need help in filing an allegation report with the appropriate party.

Illinois Baptist State Association plans to respond to this request in two ways.

1. IBSA will train Directors and Associational leaders in responding appropriately to survivors, alleged or confirmed perpetrators, and churches when abuse reports are received. In addition to training designated staff to receive calls from survivors or pastors in crisis, IBSA will work to train a broad spectrum of Illinois Baptist leaders in initial response best practices.
2. IBSA will offer resources and training to church leaders in making an appropriate response to victims of sexual abuse. Experts have found that a supportive initial response is crucial in the healing process of a survivor. In-person and online trainings, accompanied by an easily accessible checklist, will be made available to all Illinois Baptist leaders.

#2: We request that state conventions, in consultation with Lifeway and the Executive Committee, add a series of questions on the Annual Church Profile regarding background checks and sexual abuse training.

IBSA is open to working with Lifeway and in consultation with other Baptist state conventions on enhancements to ACP questions that can consistently and concisely address this need. In 2021, 97% of IBSA churches completed an Annual Church Profile, demonstrating their strong and transparent engagement in providing shared information.

#3: We request that state conventions maintain a list of professionally trained, licensed, trauma-informed Christian counselors in their respective states for those churches who voluntarily seek assistance as they minister to survivors.

IBSA will seek to develop relationships with trauma-informed counselors, many of whom are Illinois Baptists. A list of available trauma-informed counselors will be maintained by IBSA and kept readily available. IBSA will strive to connect survivors, leaders, and churches who are ministering in a sexual abuse crisis with one of these counselors.

#4: We request that state conventions establish a self-certification program for churches, including “best practices” in survivor care, hiring, investigatory protocols, and training for prevention.

IBSA is exploring self-certification for churches and local associations. For the past three years, IBSA has sought to continually update its resources and training strategies as more effective ways to help victims and churches are discovered. Child protection training continues to be offered through IBSA’s Growth Team. Training can be accessed for IBSA member churches in-person and online. A booklet, *Child Protection: Creating Safe Environments*, has been developed to help churches establish appropriate policies or update current strategies. IBSA is committed to continuing to grow in this important area.

#5: We request all state [convention] entities and committees provide training regarding sexual abuse prevention and survivor care to their denominational workers, as well as background checks, as part of their orientation and selection.

Background checks, social media checks, and reference checks are required for employment at IBSA. Background checks are also required to participate in many ministries through IBSA, such as serving in Disaster Relief, state-led mission trip participation, and becoming a camp volunteer. Every camp volunteer is required to complete their camp-specific online training before they can be approved to serve as a camp leader or volunteer. IBSA is studying possible recommendations to messengers to extend this requirement to include additional volunteer leaders, and to enable all IBSA member churches to access Sex Abuse Prevention Training for their leaders at a discounted rate.

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