



January 25, 2021

**The Honorable Greg Abbott, Governor of Texas  
The Honorable Dan Patrick, Lieutenant Governor of Texas  
The Honorable Dade Phelan, Speaker of the Texas House**

**Dear Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick, and Speaker Phelan:**

As members of the Texas Ethics & Religious Liberty Committee (TERLC) of The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC), we would like to first thank you for your service to the great state of Texas. The SBTC is a non-partisan confessional fellowship based on a partnership with likeminded congregations in a cooperative ministry. We currently have 2,669 Texas churches affiliated with our Convention.

We believe that all citizens have the right and responsibility to participate in local, state, and national elections and to use their influence to effect change, and we are resolved to pray for our elected officials. We are specifically praying for you and the entire legislature to seek the wisdom of God and know His ways as you promote what is good and restrain what is evil.

As you enter the 87th Legislative Session, we ask you to include the following legislative priorities that are in accordance with our resolutions, which are important to our Convention and thousands of churches across the Lone Star State:

### **RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**

We call on our state and local governments to embrace 1) religious liberty as a basic and essential human right; and 2) the exercise of our deeply held religious beliefs and God-given conscience, which we believe is an indispensable human right discerned from Scripture and an essential component of a free society as affirmed by the founders of our nation. We call on our government to continue vigorous support of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, and to **resist, object to, and defeat any social or political agenda which seeks to foster an aggressive secularization or mandate in the marketplace that is hostile to or discriminatory toward the free exercise right of American citizens to express their religious convictions in public places.**

### **SANCTITY OF LIFE**

We believe we should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Holy Scripture states that the very soul of an individual exists in the womb beginning at conception. The Bible teaches that all people were created in the image of God; were specifically designed for a special purpose; and the Declaration of Independence affirms the "inalienable" right to life. **All human life, born and unborn, deserves equal dignity and rights, and those who are old, those who are ill, those who are disabled, mentally and physically impaired deserve full protection and honor as human beings.**

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## GAMBLING

We declare our opposition to gambling, specifically to the expansion of gambling in Texas. We call upon our elected officials to reject any state budget that relies on monies from gambling to fund legitimate state responsibilities. These facts and statistics support our opposition:

\*The gambling industry spends massive amounts of advertising money, luring many people into gambling addiction.

\*Approximately one in thirty citizens gambles compulsively, resulting in serious consequences for families.

\*Six percent of teenagers are already addicted to gambling.

\*Statistics in gambling communities show a **crime rate eighty-four percent higher than the national average**, while some gambling communities have **experienced up to a seventy percent decline in retail sales**.

\*Annual proceeds from the Texas Lottery pay for only ten days of the state's yearly educational costs, although advocates convinced voters that educational costs in Texas would be significantly funded.

State budget demands will test the resolve of elected officials to provide for our needs without succumbing to the temptation to depend upon revenues from casino gambling, Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs), Daily Fantasy Sports, and expanded lotteries to meet legitimate budget needs. Gambling is the attempt to meet one's needs through chance while Scripture encourages us to build resources through labor (Proverbs 13:11). Gambling further burdens those already in financial difficulty.

## 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 or pharmaceutical efforts to change their physiological nature. 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.***

## THE FAMILY, EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND PARENTAL RIGHTS

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 civilization. Scripture also instructs parents to ensure the godly education of their children; and whether in public schools, private schools, home schools, or through church education programs, parents must have the freedom to exercise their parental authority to make the choice that is best for their family, which includes the right to demand discontinuation of offensive sex-ed materials and programs that undermine parental rights and the traditional biblical family. As parents, we also have the fundamental right to hold accountable schools, institutions, and industries for their moral influence on our children. **We call upon the Legislature to protect parental rights in the upbringing of children and to reject any and all attempts that threaten these freedoms – especially in the areas of religious beliefs, education, medical and/or psychological evaluations and procedures.**



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## ORPHAN CARE

We will continue to advocate for the care of foster children and the adoption of orphaned children as a command given by God (James 1:27). In order to protect vulnerable and orphaned children, **we encourage policies that assist and incentivize the adoption of orphaned children and encourage more faith-based programs for children in foster care.**

## SEX TRAFFICKING

Regarding the brutal sex-trafficking industry, **which is modern-day slavery**, it is imperative that we increase awareness of 1) the recruiting methods of criminals; and 2) the best policies for crime prevention, protection of vulnerable children and the prosecution of the perpetrators.

These criminal acts, which incapacitate victims by permanently scarring them physically and emotionally, also result in the deaths of thousands. The ever-expanding and increasingly mainstream pornography industry and online activity of perpetrators who pursue minors and seek ever younger children for its lucrative films, videos, and printed materials, drives the demand for child sexual exploitation. These crimes, typically committed out of the sight of caring people, go largely unrecognized and unreported by our communities.

## ECONOMIC FREEDOM

We call upon the 87th Texas Legislature to consider as essential the freedom to work and earn an income free from oppressive regulations, high tax rates, and lockdowns. Because consumer debt and financial difficulties have risen significantly in 2020, we can expect the harsh realities of financial hardship, joblessness, and indebtedness to lead to the downfall of many marriages and families. ***We beseech you to make the preservation of the family unit a top priority as you lead public policy efforts.***

As bills are filed in the 87th legislature, we will make every effort to communicate which bills we will support and which ones we are adamantly opposed. Please feel free to contact us for further discussion, as well as for prayer.

God Bless you,

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