

Southern Baptist Convention president faces criticism for new church hire

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [July 1, 2020](#) issue



Southern Baptist Convention president J.D. Greear speaks during the annual meeting in Dallas on June 12, 2018. (RNS photo by Adelle M. Banks)

Since the beginning of 2019, Southern Baptist Convention president J. D. Greear has been among the highest-profile advocates for preventing sexual abuse and protecting victims of abuse in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Now advocates for abuse survivors are criticizing Greear after his church decided to hire a teaching pastor who has been accused of mishandling an abuse claim in the past.

Greear, who is expected to continue to serve as SBC president for another year due to the coronavirus pandemic, said he stands by the Summit Church's decision to hire Bryan Loritts.

Ten years ago, accusations arose that Rick Trotter, Loritts's brother-in-law, was involved in sexual misconduct at Fellowship Memphis, a church Loritts helped found in 2003, and where Trotter was worship director.

The following year, Trotter became a subcontractor at Downtown Church. Leaders of both churches "openly discussed Trotter's prior sexual misconduct and the counseling he attended for sexual addiction," a joint statement said.

But after Trotter became a full-time staffer with Downtown Church, he was terminated when another instance of sexual misconduct was reported.

In 2018 he received a 60-day sentence after confessing to using a phone camera to videotape under the skirts of female congregants and pleading guilty to four counts of video voyeurism, according to the *Commercial Appeal*.

Loritts, who went on to become pastor of Abundant Life Christian Fellowship in Mountain View, California, was not available for comment. Leaders of the Memphis churches could not be reached immediately for comment.

Greear's letter details a "comprehensive background check" of Loritts, including "extensive character interviews" over four months.

"We would not—and I believe you know this—bring any pastor here whom we were not convinced was fully supportive of the direction we believe churches need to go on the prevention of and reporting of abuse and care for survivors," Greear concluded in the statement.

Cheryl Summers, who has organized annual For Such a Time as This rallies seeking more SBC action to address abuse, said she and other advocates were "disheartened and alarmed" when they learned of Loritts's new role.

She described him as "someone who is alleged to have covered up sex crimes committed by a family member while both men were employed by a Memphis area church." —Religion News Service