

The SBC will sell its Nashville headquarters to defray abuse-related legal costs

by [Bob Smietana](#)

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The headquarters of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey, File)

An investigation into how leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention have dealt with sexual abuse by clergy has cost more than \$12 million over the past three years, causing the nation's largest Protestant denomination to put its Nashville, Tennessee, headquarters up for sale, the SBC's executive committee announced on Tuesday.

The expenditures, which include \$3 million spent fending off a lawsuit filed by a former SBC president, have led the committee to spend down its reserves in what its auditors have called an unsustainable manner. The group, which met in Nashville

this week, also approved a loan to cover budget shortfalls.

The executive committee's fiscal woes come as the denomination is struggling to implement reforms ordered by the SBC's governing body two years ago, designed to help churches better prevent and respond to abuse.

On Tuesday, members of the executive committee also voted to set up a new department to deal with the issue of abuse reforms, which will take over the reform effort from volunteers.

"Southern Baptists, we have had two task forces that have done difficult and important work, but it's time now to stop talking about what we're going to do and take an initial strategic step of action that puts into place an administrative response to this issue," Jeff Iorg, president of the Nashville-based executive committee, told trustees.

Iorg described the new department as a "beginning point of a workable solution" on the issue of abuse reform.

A website, approved in June 2022, was supposed to include the names of Southern Baptist pastors and leaders convicted of abuse, those who confessed to abuse or have a court judgment for abuse against them, as well as those who have credible allegations of abuse made against them.

To date, no names have been added to the [site](#), and SBC leaders have no current plans to update it and have taken no responsibility for it.

Josh Wester, a North Carolina pastor who helped start the commission, said names can't be added to the site without a go-ahead from the SBC's executive committee.

"When and if the EC notifies us they have cleared the hurdles on their end, we will make it live," Wester said in a text. Wester is the former chair of a task force, [dissolved](#) earlier this year after making limited progress, that had been charged with implementing abuse reform.

At the executive committee's meeting on Tuesday, Iorg said that the committee had no ties to the Abuse Response Commission or any control over its work. Instead, he said, the committee would focus on hiring staff for the new department before taking up other issues.

“Our first step will be to hire a full-time executive director,” Iorg said in an email. “Once that new leadership is in place, we will begin to take next steps, including enhancing resources available through that website.”

The executive committee’s new abuse reform department will be funded initially with \$1.8 million provided by Send Relief, a humanitarian project led by the SBC’s two mission boards. A spokesman for the North American Mission Board said the funds will be given directly to the Executive Committee. In the past, the heads of the mission boards barred funds from going directly to the Abuse Response Commission.

The Executive Committee’s building, at 901 Commerce St. in downtown Nashville, was originally built for \$8 million in the 1980s, on land donated by Lifeway, the SBC’s publishing arm, [according to](#) Baptist Press, an official SBC publication.

The property also houses the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, a library, and a historical archive. The building was appraised for \$31.7 million in 2021, [according to](#) the *Tennessean* newspaper. —Religion News Service