

# SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

## PROCEDURES FOR MAKING PUBLIC STATEMENTS

### **I. Policies on Statements from Council and Executive Staff**

In 2015, SBL adopted a policy on the [Role of the Society in Making Public Statements](#). That policy supplements the [SBL Policy Manual's](#) section on "Media Relations," which includes guidelines for Public Policy Statements from Council and Public Statements from the Executive Director. These guidelines ([https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/Policy\\_Manual.pdf](https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/Policy_Manual.pdf)) are as follows:

#### **Public Policy Statements**

The Council may agree to approve a resolution (approval policy has been established) on any public issue for which a "voice from SBL" could improve the public dialogue. The Executive Director is authorized to add SBL's name to others' statements, letters, proclamations, etc. which clearly fit within the guidelines below:

- Support of the SBL mission

- Support the approved strategic initiatives to promote the SBL mission

#### **Public Statements**

Using discretion, the Executive Director may speak out or lend his/her name to positions being taken by other leaders, so long as it is made clear he or she is not representing an official position of SBL and informs the Council whenever such positions become publicly controversial. Council members should be cognizant of the fact that they must avoid conflicts of interest and should always ensure that their actions and public statements do not put personal interests above the best interests of the organization.

Statements issued by SBL Council and Executive Staff will adhere to the guidelines established by both the SBL Policy Manual's section on "Media Relations" and the 2015 policy on the "Role of the Society in Making Public Statements."

### **II. Procedures for Members Submitting Requests for Statements**

Members of the SBL have a number of informal avenues and resources for advancing interests of the Society within its current structures. Not least of these is the voluntary leadership model that is the basis of a learned society and membership organization. Members serve in over 1,500 voluntary roles, including steering committees, editorial boards, program units, committees of Council, and Council. Individuals in these positions develop agendas for the Society and are accessible to any fellow member in the Society. Individual are encouraged to influence the direction of the organization through these avenues.

From time to time, members of the Society of Biblical Literature ask the SBL Council that governs the Society to take a public position on an issue as a statement or resolution.

Endorsement of a public statement demonstrates support for a particular point of view intended to inform a process in which many points of view and many interests will be voiced. The Society's contribution to public conversation is not simply to declare what is right or wrong, but to provide a scholarly point of view that can be used in the context of informed advocacy.

The SBL Council has adopted the following guidelines for proposals and procedures for committees or groups of members to follow in preparing public statements, petitions, or resolutions to come before Council for consideration, approval, or endorsement.

## **1. Guidelines for Proposals**

In order for the Society to take informed action on requests for public statements, proponents should provide thorough and convincing arguments. These guidelines set forth the content and format for a well-argued proposal for the Society's endorsement of public statements.

To make a decision about taking and communicating a position, the SBL Council will expect three items: (1) a proposal for an SBL position on the matter, (2) evidence that the proposal has been endorsed by at least ten percent (10%) of its current membership or has the unanimous support of an SBL governance committee that is generating the proposal, and (3) a draft statement suitable for public dissemination that expresses the proposed position.

Proposals may be submitted to the Society's executive office for a public statement, and the Executive Director will forward it to the Chair and members of the Executive Committee of Council. Proposals may be submitted by committees or group of members at any time and should include the following elements:

- **Concern.** A brief history of the issue, including a description of the context, the situation being addressed, and who is affected and how.
- **Context.** A description of the scholarly or guild dimensions of the issue. This section should include a discussion of how the proponents requesting the statement have come to be involved in the issue as biblical scholars, the nature of their involvement, and the ways in which the issue falls within the boundaries of the Society's mission.
- **Relevance.** A description of the issue's relationship and relevance to biblical scholarship. Public statements endorsed by SBL should reflect a distinctively guild perspective. The request for a statement should include a well-argued brief on expert grounds for the position being sought.
- **Recommendations.** Requests for public statements must specify recommendations, not just conclusions, and indicate who is requested to act. The way in which the recommendations derive from the preponderance of guild relevance and self-understanding should be clearly demonstrated. If a statement seeks action, it should specify upon whom such action is urged and detail the action being sought. If a resolution involves a policy, it should specify what policy such action affects and show consideration for the operational and financial implications of such action.

- Strategic Analysis. SBL is interested in issuing statements that contribute to public debate and the effectiveness of the guild it represents. To be effective, a public statement cannot simply be “issued.” It must fit into a thoughtful strategy for timely communication to relevant audiences within the public debate. Thus proponents need to provide a strategic description of the context in which an SBL public statement will be used and how it relates to the [SBL Mission](#).
- Statement. The proposal must include a draft text for a public statement on the issue.

In its responsibilities as a fiduciary of the Society, the SBL Council may determine whether or not a request for a public statement is appropriate. The following are guidelines for the SBL Council and the Society in making public statements that are in keeping with SBL’s 2015 policy on the [Role of the Society in Making Public Statements](#):

- Public statements and resolutions should address matters of clear common professional interest and concern to the Society’s membership.
- Public statements should be issued only on matters about which the Society’s members have special knowledge and or expertise.
- Public statements should contribute to better public understanding of the matter being addressed.

## **2. Procedures**

1. Any SBL committee or group of members may submit a proposal to the Society’s executive office for a public statement, and the Executive Director will forward it to the Chair and members of the Executive Committee of Council.
2. The Executive Committee of Council is intended to act as a catalyst and resource, not as a censor or arbiter of what positions SBL should or should not endorse. The Executive Committee will review the proposal for conformity with the above guidelines. The committee may request that the proponents revise the proposal and public statement accordingly, may suggest coordination with various SBL sections or committees having similar concerns, and may also suggest additional means of communicating the proposed perspective.
3. The Executive Committee must submit to the Executive Director and the Finance Committee all statements deemed to have fiscal implications before they appear on the Council agendas so that the executive office can provide fiscal information as it impacts SBL’s budget.
4. The Executive Committee will place the proposal on the agenda for the next Council meeting. If there is insufficient time to properly address step 3, the proposal will be placed on the next possible Council meeting agenda.
5. The SBL Council will make a final decision regarding endorsement of the proposal. Council may endorse the proposal as presented, may request revisions to strengthen the form or substance of the proposal, send to an existing committee or name a task force to address, or may decline endorsement. Proponents who disagree with the decisions of the Council are free to communicate their concerns to the Council through the Executive Director.

### **III. Communication with Members and the Public**

1. The Executive Director disseminates the statement to membership, and, if necessary, creates additional “products” containing the statement. The Executive Director may issue a press release.
2. Members, committees, or individuals advocating for the public statement may use the Society’s name in such a way as to imply the Society’s endorsement of that position after the statement is issued by the Executive Director.
3. The SBL executive office will post all Society public statements on the SBL website and when appropriate in the [SBL Policy Manual](#).