



News Release

Office of the Attorney General

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Attorney General Issues Opinion on State Book Legislation

House Bill 615/Senate Bill 1108 unconstitutional under both Tennessee and Federal Law

Tennessee Attorney General Herbert H. Slatery III, at the request of the State Legislature, reviewed a proposed bill designating the Holy Bible the Official State Book of Tennessee.

“It is our legal opinion that the bill would violate not only the First Amendment of the United States Constitution but the Tennessee Constitution as well. Interestingly, the Tennessee Supreme Court has held the Tennessee Constitution to be more restrictive than the federal Constitution,” Slatery said. The Tennessee Constitution says “no *preference* shall *ever* be given, by law, to any religious establishment or mode of worship.”

The Tennessee Supreme Court has characterized this constitutional protection against religious establishment as "substantially stronger" than the protection afforded by the Establishment Clause of the federal Constitution. *State ex rel. Comm'r of Transp. v. Eagle*, 63 S.W.3d 734,761 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2001) citing *Carden v. Bland*, 288 S.W.2d 718,721 (Tenn. 1956).

“While it may not be the government’s role to establish the Bible as the Official State Book of Tennessee, that does not lessen the value it has in the public forum. I am quite confident that the Bible’s distinguished place in history will not be diminished in the absence of a state’s endorsement,” Attorney General Slatery said.