

High court to hear Commandments cases: Cases from Kentucky and Texas

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The U.S. Supreme Court has decided to hear two cases related to ongoing questions about the constitutionality of displays of the Ten Commandments in public places.

Legal groups who have long hoped the high court would address this issue—for the first time since 1980—welcomed the announcement by the court October 12.

“The decision to review a case involving the display of the Ten Commandments is long overdue,” said Mat Staver, president and general counsel of Liberty Counsel, a Florida-based law organization representing McCreary and Pulaski counties in Kentucky.

“The lower courts are hopelessly in confusion over the constitutionality of governmental displays of the Ten Commandments,” added Staver, who has argued that courthouses in McCreary and Pulaski counties have the right to display the Ten Commandments along with other historical documents.

The other case involves Thomas Van Orden of Austin, Texas, who has argued that the Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the state capitol in Austin represents government endorsement of Judeo-Christian beliefs above other faiths.

“This is a critical opportunity for the high court to clarify one of the most confusing areas of church-state law,” said Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, who believes the displays are constitutional.

Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, also hoped for clarification, but with a different outcome. “Religious symbols belong in houses of worship, not courthouses, city halls and public schools,” said Lynn, who is a clergyman in the United Church of Christ.

Likewise, a Baptist church-state attorney said that displays of the Ten Commandments on government property disrespect religious diversity by playing favorites. Said K. Hollyn Hollman, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, "all Americans should be concerned when government meddles in matters of religion. -*Religion News Service*