

Ten Commandments memorial resolution given green light

A granite monument inscribed with the Ten Commandments would find its way back to the Kentucky State Capitol grounds if House Joint Resolution 15 is adopted.

On Monday, lawmakers on the Senate State and Local Government Committee advanced HJR 15 with an 8-1-1 vote. Rep. Shane Baker, R-Somerset, and Rep. Jason Petrie, R-Elkton, testified in favor of the measure.

“This resolution basically does three things: It directs the Historic Properties Advisory Commission to retrieve the monument. It directs them to return that monument to the State Capitol grounds and place it in monument park, then to simply maintain the display,” Baker, primary sponsor of the resolution, testified.

The State Capitol Monument Park includes the Kentucky Organ Donor Monument and the Kentucky COVID Memorial, among others.

Baker said there’s a long history and tradition of public monuments and displays that acknowledge the role and significance of the Ten Commandments and the role they’ve played in the history of the United



Courtesy photo

Rep. Shane Baker, R-Somerset, speaks Monday during a meeting of the Senate State and Local Government Committee. He testified in favor of House Joint Resolution 15, which calls for the return of a Ten Commandments monument to the State Capitol grounds.

States.

The Kentucky State Aerie of the Fraternal Order of Eagles donated the moment to Kentucky in 1971. It remained on permanent display until the 1980s, when it was moved to storage amid a construction project.

Lawmakers passed a resolution to return the display in 2000. However, a court prohibited the enforcement of the resolution, and the monument was returned it to the Fra-

ternal Order of Eagles in Hopkinsville.

In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the exhibition of an essentially identical monument at the Texas State Capitol, Baker said, arguing that the court has resolved legal issues around such displays.

Sen. Keturah Herron, D-Louisville, said she’s a Christian who grew up in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and still attends church on a regular basis. But she cast a pass vote and said she had concerns about making sure other beliefs are represented at the Capitol.

“I’m just curious as to why specifically the Ten Commandments, and if we were to do something like that, what are we going to do to ensure other religions like Buddhism, Muslims, other faiths have a presence here at our Capitol,” she asked.

Baker said the resolution isn’t about religious displays; it’s about returning a historic monument to the Capitol grounds.

“Anyone’s welcome to, if they so desire, to go in the future and file bills or resolutions in that vein to do exactly what you’re talking about, but that’s not what

we’re trying to do today,” he said.

Petrie said there have been similar questions posed by House members during this legislative session.

“This deals with a particular historical event, and also a particular monument with particular reasons that endured or suffered through a particular set of Supreme Court cases and tests that, over decades, became obsolete,” he said.

Sen. Cassie Chambers Armstrong, D-Louisville, said she’s a person of faith, and she appreciates the helpful information included in the resolution. However, she voted against the measure, saying that, after reading the key legal cases, it is not clear that returning the display would pass the new legal test.

“I’m worried we’re opening ourselves up to litigation that could be very costly, and I think there’s a lot of legal uncertainty. I recognize this is a very fast-changing landscape,” she said.

Senate Majority Caucus Chair Robby Mills, R-Henderson, spoke briefly as he voted for the measure.

“I just think that the Ten

Commandments are historical documents, almost kind of a secular code of conduct, very fitting to place them here,” he said.

— Submitted

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House votes to criminalize interference of legislative proceedings

The Kentucky House of Representatives advanced a bill on Friday that would make interference of legislative proceedings a misdemeanor in most circumstances.

Rep. John Blanton, R-Salyersville, is the primary sponsor of House Bill 399. He said the bill is the result of an incident from the 2023 legislative ses-

sion where protestors in the House gallery caused a loud disruption that impeded the legislature's ability to do its job.

“(The bill) will ensure that the general assembly has an opportunity to legislate without interference from people who wish to prevent us from doing our work on behalf of our constituents,” Blanton said.

Blanton said the executive branch and judicial branches of state government have similar powers when it comes to curtailing certain disruptions.

“Judges have the power to deal with interruptions in their courtroom by use of criminal contempt proceedings,” Blanton said as an example of how the bill would give the legislature

similar protections.

Under HB 399, a person would be guilty of second-degree interference of a legislative proceeding if they enter or remain inside a chamber or gallery of the general assembly or another room being used for the general assembly with the intent to impede or prevent

SEE **VOTE/PAGE B6**

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