

Georgia enacts two Bible-related laws: Bible classes and Decalogue displays

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Georgia governor Sonny Perdue has signed into law two bills that critics say may blur the line between church and state. But First Amendment watchdog groups indicated they will wait to see how the laws are put into effect before filing challenges.

One measure signed April 20 made Georgia the first state believed to sanction elective classes about the Bible in public high schools. The state's education department has until February to draft curricula for schools that choose to offer courses taught "in an objective and nondevotional manner with no attempt made to indoctrinate students." The U.S. Supreme Court long ago deemed that such nondevotional courses about the Bible, its history and its role in literature are constitutional.

The other bill, permitting the display of the Ten Commandments at courthouses, was drawn up in the state legislature in hopes that it would fall within the guidelines of the U.S. justices' split decision last June. The high court said that such exhibits are constitutional if the main purpose is to honor U.S. legal, rather than religious, traditions, and if they are not installed to promote one religious tradition over another.