



North American Mission Board

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NAMB.NET

December 15, 2020

Dear SBC Ministry Leaders:

While we are all rightly focused on celebrating Christ's birth during this Christmas season, I need to update you on another matter – the litigation filed against the North American Mission Board (NAMB) by a former state convention executive.

While the lawsuit was filed nearly four years ago, the merits of the issues have still not been heard by a judge or jury. Before that happens, NAMB wants to make sure the federal courts fully explore the religious liberty protections afforded all churches and ministries by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As a result, we have decided to appeal the case to the United States Supreme Court. That appeal will be filed early next year. Because appeals to the Supreme Court are rarely granted, we want to openly communicate with you about our reasons for this effort and about the risks to your ministries should our effort be unsuccessful.

As Southern Baptists, as Christians, as leaders in our local churches, we each care deeply about our autonomy. We all know that the local church is the controlling entity in the SBC and will always remain so. Similarly, we all know that local churches, local pastors, local associations, state conventions, and national entities should be free to make ministry decisions free of government oversight and interference. When ministry disagreements do arise, those disputes need to be resolved biblically, not by secular courts. This lawsuit filed against NAMB poses a very real risk to the autonomy and freedom we all enjoy. As soon as we allow the government to dictate what we do and how we do it, we all lose our ability to freely share the Gospel and execute our ministry strategy without interference from the government.

For NAMB's Trustees, that's what this case is about. It's about protecting our ability – and your ability – to freely exercise our religious faith and ministerial decision-making.

This freedom and precious right must be defended.

I love what I recently read that Judge Alice Batchelder said in 2015, “This constitutional protection [freedom of religion] is not only a personal one; it is a structural one that categorically prohibits federal and state governments from becoming involved in religious leadership disputes.”

Similarly, earlier this year, Judge James Ho said, “In short, protecting religious institutions from government interference is not just the point of the church autonomy doctrine that the Supreme Court has recognized for nearly 150 years – it is foundational to who we are as Americans.”

There will be some who suggest that NAMB simply does not want to face the claims in the lawsuit. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, this case is far bigger than NAMB or one person's claims. It is about protecting our churches and pastors from intrusive government interference into our polity and practices. It's about standing up for the religious freedoms we enjoy as Americans, as followers of Jesus, as Southern Baptists, and as pastors.

We ask for your prayers as we seek to ensure that you and all Southern Baptists are protected in our ministerial decision-making now and in the future.

Danny de Armas
Chairman
NAMB Board of Trustees