



BILL HASLAM
GOVERNOR
STATE OF TENNESSEE

April 14, 2016

The Honorable Beth Harwell
Speaker of the House
301 6th Avenue North
Legislative Plaza, Suite 19
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: House Bill 615

Dear Speaker Harwell,

I am vetoing House Bill 615, the legislation designating The Holy Bible as the official state book.

As you know, last year the Attorney General opined that designating The Holy Bible as the official state book of Tennessee would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Federal Constitution and Article I, § 3, of the Tennessee Constitution, which provides that “no preference shall ever be given, by law, to any religious establishment or mode of worship.”

In addition to the constitutional issues with the bill, my personal feeling is that this bill trivializes the Bible, which I believe is a sacred text. If we believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, then we shouldn't be recognizing it only as a book of historical and economic significance. If we are recognizing the Bible as a sacred text, then we are violating the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Tennessee by designating it as the official state book. Our founders recognized that when the church and state were combined, it was the church that suffered in the long run.

I strongly disagree with those who are trying to drive religion out of the public square. All of us should and must bring our deepest beliefs to the places we are called, including government service. Men and women motivated by faith have every right and obligation to bring their belief and commitment to the public debate. However, that is very different from the governmental establishment of religion that our founders warned against and our Constitution prohibits.

For these reasons, I am vetoing House Bill 615.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Haslam".

Bill Haslam

cc: The Honorable Ron Ramsey, Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the Senate
The Honorable Members of the 109th General Assembly