



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 29, 2011

Sponsor of Tenn. Anti-Shariah Law Removes Reference to Islam

An amendment has been proposed to alter the language of a bill currently pending before the Tennessee General Assembly that would criminalize the violent practice of Shariah law in the state.

In response to the outrage expressed by many Muslims living in middle Tennessee, the measure's chief proponent, Senator Bill Ketron (R-Murfreesboro, pictured) has suggested removing language that refers specifically to Islam.



Regarding the change, Senator Ketron said that the original intent of the bill is better reflected in the new language, as the goal from the beginning was to prevent or deter violent or terrorist acts, but [to do] so without any room for misinterpretation regarding the language's [effect] on peaceful religious practices."

Opponents of the legislation expressed concern that the lawful and peaceful practices of Islam would be proscribed under the original terms of the measure. Such practices include prayer, fasting, and abstinence from alcohol and (among some Muslims) alcohol.

According to the previous iteration of the bill, the state Attorney General was empowered to "designate" as a "Sharia[h] organization" any group that had a purpose of engaging in or encouraging "Shariah jihad" through violence or criminal activity. Such activity was categorized as a felony and punishable by up to 15 years in prison and fines. This would include anyone offering support to any group so designated.

Shariah, which means path in Arabic, is the sacred law of Islam. The precepts of Shariah have two sources: the Koran and the writings of Mohammed. Shariah is the code that is responsible for the stoning of adulteresses; the caning of rape victims; and the restrictions on dress, rights of inheritance, and marital status of women.

According to an article published by the Nashville daily, [The Tennessean](#), the fears of many of the areas Muslim residents have not been quelled by the proposed amendment.

"We would like to look at these changes. We welcome taking references to Shariah out of the bill," said Saleh Sbenaty, a professor of engineering technology at MTSU and member of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro. "Nonetheless, the bill was founded based on fears of the Muslim community or by linking the Muslim community to terrorist groups."

Ketron and his co-sponsors disagree with that portrayal. In a joint statement issued by the bills chief



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architects, the lawmakers stated:

Rep. Matheny and I asked our legislative attorneys to rework this bill to reflect this as clearly as possible so there would be no confusion regarding this matter. The result is a stronger bill that gets at the problem of material support for homegrown terrorism, without any doubt that it does not impact peaceful religious practices of any religion.

Another outspoken critic of the measure (whether amended or not) is Murfreesboro attorney John Green. Green admitted that he has not read the proposed amendments, but says that it won't make any difference in his opinion on the matter. In a statement to *The Tennessean*, he asserted,

I think the bill is unenforceable as drafted or amended. It still targets a particular religion and it's duplicative to state and federal statutes. What the bill seeks to regulate is already covered by existing law.

There are those who agree with Green's assessment of the vulnerability of the law as originally drafted.

Gadeir Abbas, an attorney for the controversial Muslim organization Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) insisted that the bills singling out of Shariah violates the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment, as well as the Fourteenth Amendment's Due Process Clause. Said Abbas:

Now you really have to challenge it under like a due process violation, saying that designating someone as a terrorist organization without a court proceeding is a due process violation. And it's hard to do that without there being an actual sense of enforcement.

CAIR [has](#) doggedly opposed many similar anti-Shariah measures proposed in other states.

One of the bills' co-sponsors attempted to clarify the measure's neutral intent. House Speaker Pro Tempore Judd Matheny (R-Tennessee) observed:

As amended, this bill has absolutely no references to any specific religion. It is about protecting our citizens from those who would use religious doctrine as a justification to commit criminal activities or terrorist acts.

As reported previously in [The New American](#), similar anti-Shariah measures have been adopted by or are pending in several state legislatures around the Republic.



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