The Ten Commandments trend is a natural exploration of a shady area in constitutional law.
**John Witte**, a law professor at Emory University and expert on the separation of church and state, said it's unclear whether the recent county displays would withstand court challenges.

The U.S. Supreme Court has not ruled on a public religious display since 1989, Witte said, and the question of whether a Ten Commandments poster implies government endorsement of religion is complicated.

Governments can insulate themselves from lawsuits by surrounding the Ten Commandments with secular documents such as the Declaration of Independence, and the question also can depend on where in a courthouse the Ten Commandments are shown.

County officials that vote to show the Ten Commandments "are trying to test the edges of what's appropriate," Witte said.

"Some see this as a right-wing conspiracy to inject religion into public life, and it may be that, but it's also the acceptance of an invitation by the Supreme Court that we want to leave these things to lower courts," he said.

A few lawmakers in the Georgia House tried to clarify the matter last winter, but a bill never made it to a vote.

The bill would have forced the state to pick up legal tabs from courthouse Ten Commandments challenges as long as the local governments agreed to display the document along with other secular writings. It was thought the bill's passage would embolden more counties to show the Ten Commandments.

Adams said he wasn't worried about the lack of a state rule or clear court ruling defining when a Ten Commandments display is legal.

"It's kind of a no-brainer thing to me," Adams said. "I don't see what it could possibly harm."

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