



ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

April 10, 2015

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention, I am writing to express our strong support for HB 0962, a bill that will increase the deterrents for animal fighting. There is no question that Tennessee has become a beacon for animal fighting, gambling, and organized crime. Unlike our neighboring states of Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Missouri, and Arkansas that have increased the penalties for animal fighting, Tennessee continues to put out the welcome mat for criminals from around the country.

Cockfighting is a lucrative crime, and the current spectator fine of \$50 is a slap on the wrist compared to the gambling winnings. HB 0962 increases the spectator penalties and will serve as a deterrent to those seeking to engage in criminal behavior in our state. Gambling and animal fighting are societal ills that are each harmful to our communities on their own. However, when the two are combined, the result is individuals betting on the outcome of undeniable cruelty.

Sadly, the presence of children is a common sight at these fights. At a recent raid, law enforcement found that organizers had set up a childcare area adjacent to the fighting pit. HB 0962 establishes a mandatory minimum penalty for bringing a child to a fight. The ERLC holds the family as the foundation of culture and society. Our children are our greatest gift, and it is critical that they are protected from this violent and brutal activity.

Christians are called to be stewards of all God's creation. With that duty comes the responsibility to protect God's creatures from wanton and unnecessary cruelty. I am asking you to vote YES on HB 0962 so that our good state is no longer a symbol of bad deeds, but instead an example to the rest of the country of protecting the innocent and the vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,

Russell D. Moore, Ph.D.
President