

Street Preacher's Arrest in Mississippi Sparks Supreme Court Case on Free Speech Rights

The arrest of a Mississippi street preacher outside a concert venue has led to a case now before the U.S. Supreme Court. The outcome could shape how citizens challenge local laws they say infringe on constitutional rights.

Gabriel Olivier, an evangelical street preacher, argues that a Brandon, Mississippi, ordinance barring him from certain public property violated his religious liberty and freedom of speech. After lower courts prevented him from challenging the law, the Supreme Court agreed to take up a procedural question that could set an important precedent for future First Amendment disputes.

At the Brandon Amphitheater, where concerts routinely attract large crowds, Olivier says he sees an opportunity to share his faith. "I love to tell people about Jesus," Olivier said.

He added that he comes to the venue to "hand out gospel tracts to people, tell them about the message of Christ as they are walking to the concert."

City officials said they received complaints that Olivier spoke too loudly and shouted insults at passersby. They enforced a local ordinance requiring him to stay inside a designated protest zone outside the amphitheater. When Olivier returned to the main walkway, he was cited and fined and received a suspended ten-day jail sentence.

Nate Kellum of First Liberty Institute, which represents Olivier, said the city misapplied its own rules.

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