

# McRaney case declined, ending NAMB lawsuit

February 24, 2026

The U.S. Supreme Court declined Feb. 23 to hear a years-long case brought by former Baptist state convention executive director Will McRaney against the North American Mission Board, upholding an appeals court's [decision](#) to dismiss and essentially closing out the case.

Two judges in a three-judge panel for the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals [upheld](#) a previous dismissal in September. The majority decision pointed out “church autonomy doctrine bars all of McRaney’s claims against NAMB” and resolving his claims “would require secular courts to opine on ‘matters of faith and doctrine.’”

“The Supreme Court’s decision not to review the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision brings closure to a long and difficult legal dispute filed against our ministry nearly nine years ago,” NAMB said in a statement.

“The outcome in this matter—the opinion of the Fifth Circuit—now stands as a landmark protection of religious liberty for all Southern Baptists and other people of faith.

“The Fifth Circuit recognized and respected doctrinal autonomy and voluntary cooperation among Baptist churches and ministries, while also carefully applying longstanding First Amendment principles that protect religious organizations from having internal ministry matters scrutinized by civil courts. We are grateful.”

In a statement, McRaney said he and his wife, Sandy, were grateful for the support and prayers they had received during the legal process.

“While we are disappointed the Supreme Court did not choose to grant cert in this particular case, we trust in time justice will be done and the rights of Baptist people and partners restored,” McRaney said. “This decision will have an impact on millions of Baptists and other religious groups.

“The Southern Baptist Convention and all of its entities won pyrrhic victories today and in the Sept. 2025 5th Circuit’s 2-1 ruling. Today after 9 years in the courts, NAMB won and secured their right to do what God forbids, to defame and interfere with Baptist ministers, partners, and financial supporters.”

In time, he continued, today’s SCOTUS decision will be viewed “as a historic loss in multiple ways.”

“NAMB has made clear in their statement that anyone who supports the mission efforts of the SBC can be defamed and their employment can be interfered with by SBC leaders without Baptist partners having the right to defend themselves in court,” McRaney’s statement said.

NAMB objected to assertions the decision would upend Baptist polity and religious liberty protection, citing the Fifth Circuit Court’s decision that “Baptist ecclesiology is non-hierarchical, and each Baptist church is autonomous.”

“Nevertheless, Baptist churches have long voluntarily cooperated in fellowship with one another and pooled resources for missions, evangelism, and church planting.”

McRaney, on the other hand, asserted the decision will have profound legal ramifications.

“As in other faith traditions like Catholics, now Baptist leaders, ministers, and partners will know for certain they have given up their personal legal rights with their voluntary partnering or contributing to the SBC. Sadly,

this can already be seen in the Garner v. SBC court case before the [Tennessee] Supreme Court where SBC leaders also lied to the [Tennessee] Supreme Court justices,” McRaney stated.

“We pray the silence by those who tolerate the lies and deceptions to the courts will be broken and wrongdoings exposed. We pray there will be forthcoming repentance by SBC entity leaders, trustees, and other Baptist leaders resulting in a surge of renewed commitment to righteousness and truth telling above all as an act of obedience to God’s Word,” McRaney said, adding he would release a fuller statement in the coming days.

NAMB concluded its statement by saying: “The [judicial] outcome both respects Baptist distinctives and reaffirms that Baptists and other non-hierarchical faith groups are no less entitled to the First Amendment’s protections against secular intrusion into ministry affairs.”

McRaney sued NAMB in April 2017, [claiming](#) libel against the entity for actions that led to his firing as the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware executive director. That lawsuit was dismissed two years later, but the dismissal [was reversed](#) in July 2020 and sent back to a district court.

NAMB actually appealed to the Supreme Court to review the case, but that appeal was [rejected](#) in June 2021. The case continued to work through the courts until the Fifth Circuit [heard from both sides](#) in April 2024.

In addition to its full statement, NAMB posted [a thread on X](#) including an FAQ on the matter. Those questions addressed how the decision affects church autonomy, lawsuits filed against religious organizations, and how the ruling does not affect NAMB’s protocols for working with churches and other ministry partners.