Funeral Protest Bans: Do They Kill Speech or Resurrect Respect for the Dead?

Kara Beil

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholar.valpo.edu/vulr/vol42/iss2/3
Notes

FUNERAL PROTEST BANS: DO THEY KILL SPEECH OR RESURRECT RESPECT FOR THE DEAD?

I. INTRODUCTION

In funerals across the country, protestors often fill the solemn air with lyrics like the following:

First to fight for the fags
Now you’re coming home in bags
And the Army goes marching to hell
Proud of all of your sin
No more battles you will win
And the Army goes marching to hell

Chorus:

Then it’s I.E.D.s
The Army’s on its knees
Count off the body parts all gone (Two! Three!)
And where e’er they go
The dying soldiers show (or) The crippled soldiers show
That the Army keeps marching to hell!
Crimes you praise in your ranks
Getting blown up in your tanks
And the Army goes marching to hell
Hating God; coward’s hearts
Ziploc bags for body parts
And the Army goes marching to hell

(Chorus)

Serve a rag, God’s hate grows
See the tags on all your toes?
And the Army goes marching to hell
For a tyrant you fight
God destroys you with His might
And the Army goes marching to hell

---

1 Westboro Baptist Church, http://www.godhatesfags.com/writings/patriotic_songs.pdf (last visited Sept. 19, 2007) (identifying the lyrics of the song titled “The Army Goes...
Members of the Westboro Baptist Church (“WBC”), led by Fred Phelps, use songs like this one, along with placards, and flyers when they protest at veterans’ funerals.2 Although the WBC’s message, that God is punishing America for tolerating homosexuality, is not welcomed by most Americans, it is their practice of choosing funerals to deliver this message that has outraged the public at large and led government at all levels across the country to respond with funeral protest bans.3 Since 2005, more than half the states proposed or passed funeral protest bans, and even more are likely to draft similar legislation in the future.4 The federal government responded as well, on Memorial Day 2006, when President Bush signed the “Respect for Fallen Heroes Act,” setting time and distance restrictions on protestors and demonstrations at military funerals held in national cemeteries.5

Marching to Hell”). Similar songs have lyrics tailored for Marines, Navy members, and homosexuals. Id.


5 38 U.S.C. § 2413 (prohibiting demonstrations or picketing within 300 feet of a national cemetery for one hour prior to and one hour after a funeral, memorial service, or ceremony with penalties that include a fine or prison up to one year or both); Associated Press 16933, supra note 3 (explaining that the House Bill was first sponsored by Representative Mike Rogers after he attended a protested military funeral in March of 2006); 10 KWTX, Bush
Despite different political or religious views about the WBC, the Iraq War, or homosexuality, the majority of Americans, as well as our courts, have recognized that respect is owed to the dead, their burial places, and to the privacy of their families. Although most Americans sympathize with the families who have to endure WBC protests while trying to mourn the loss of their loved ones, funeral protest bans raise serious First Amendment concerns. As a result of the clash of constitutional rights between protestors and mourners occurring at funerals across the country, state legislatures are attempting to address and constitutionally reconcile these newly passed bans.


Phelps, supra note 3, at 286 (describing how many states have laws that ban disruptions of religious services, such as funerals); Mary L. Clark, Treading on Hallowed Ground: Implications for Property Law and Critical Theory of Land Associated with Human Death and Burial, 94 Ky. L.J. 487 (2005) (explaining how the law has recognized respect for the dead and sanctity of land associated with death and burial, providing examples of property law exceptions for places associated with death, and pointing to government creations of cemeteries and memorials throughout history from the Civil War and Pearl Harbor Memorial to the Arlington National Cemetery and now the World Trade Center sites).

Clark, a professor at American University Washington, has stated, “[e]very humane instinct urges that the last resting place of the dead should be preserved from profanation, and the desecration of such place should make a strong appeal to the conscience of the court.” Clark, supra, at 497. Places of worship, like churches, have also been interpreted as sacred spaces in America. Id. at 497 n.16.

Richard’s, director of the Pennsylvania Center for the First Amendment, stated that “[t]he rationale behind these laws is to stop an offensive type of expression . . . but that’s the very type of expression the First Amendment continues to protect.” Id. As First Amendment scholar Ronald K.L. Collins said, “[i]t is a simple truth: The highest respect we can pay to our fallen war dead is to respect the principles for which they made the supreme sacrifice. We honor them by honoring those principles of freedom – even when a callous few vainly attempt to demean the dignity rightfully due them.” Id.; see also The Associated Press, Anti-Gay Church Says It Won’t Violate New Funeral-Protest Laws, Mar. 9, 2006, http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=16614 [hereinafter Associated Press 16614] (last visited Oct. 1, 2007). WBC member Shirley Phelps-Roper stated, “[w]e’re waiting until all the legislatures’ [sessions] are over to see what tattered shreds they’ve left the Constitution in.” Associated Press 16614, supra. But see The Associated Press, Officials Push for Illinois Law to Curb Protests Outside Funerals, Jan. 1, 2006, http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=16301 [hereinafter Associated Press 16301] (last visited Sept. 4, 2007). As Army Staff Sgt. Jeremy Doyle’s stepmother, Sandy Doyle, said, “[t]hey have a right to protest. That’s what our son died for, but not at arm’s length . . . The families need to have some sense of security.” Id. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn stated, “[a] hate group cannot use its right to speak hateful words to cancel out and heckle and harass others who are seeking to exercise their First Amendment rights to practice their religion, to assemble, and to speak in memory of someone very near to them.” Id.

Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703, 716 (2000) (noting a privacy interest in avoiding unwanted communication that changes in varying contexts); see also infra Part II.C
Part II of this Note discusses the WBC as the leading impetus behind the legislation, examines recently drafted state funeral protest bans, provides an overview of the First Amendment issues, and considers similar protest bans in other contexts. Building on this background, Part III analyzes the constitutional strengths and weaknesses in the drafting of these recent bans. Part IV proposes a model statute, based on arguments from the analysis, as to how a funeral protest ban can be constitutionally drafted to benefit states that pass a ban in the future or those states that may need to alter their current legislation if it fails in any future court challenges. Finally, Part V concludes that funeral protest bans are rooted in the general public’s support for maintaining the privacy and solemnity of funerals and mourners, as well as respect for the dead, and that these bans, if carefully drafted, will likely survive despite their constitutional challenges and provide the best remedy to the clash of rights in this conflict.

II. BACKGROUND

The main legal issue in this Note centers around whether recent funeral protest bans violate the First Amendment. Part II.A provides an overview of WBC and its tactics, as the WBC largely provided the impetus for the legislation at issue. Part II.B examines current and proposed state funeral protest bans. Part II.C provides the analytical framework and precedent for First Amendment analysis. Finally, since no court has ruled on the newly passed bans, Part II.D examines similar speech restrictions in the abortion context, as well as older church related cases, to examine how they fared in the court system and to provide

(providing a First Amendment overview of this issue) and Part III.A (analyzing the constitutionality of the statutes).

9 See infra Parts II.A-D (providing background information about WBC, funeral protest bans, and First Amendment analysis dealing with restrictions on speech).

10 See infra Part III (hypothesizing that most of the statutes are likely constitutional, based on the analysis section of this Note).

11 See infra Part IV (providing a model statute that is content-neutral on its face, contains clearly defined terms, is not vague or overbroad, sets reasonable distance and time requirements, and is equally enforceable against all groups in violation).

12 See infra Part V (concluding that carefully drafted bans are the best remedy to this issue)

13 U.S. CONST. amend I. The First Amendment states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” Id.

14 See infra Part II.A (generally discussing WBC).

15 See infra Part II.B (discussing recently passed state funeral protest laws).

16 See infra Part II.C (providing the First Amendment framework for analysis).
guidance as to how to draft a constitutional speech restriction. However, since neither the WBC nor mourning families will willingly compromise their rights in this conflict, a constitutionally drafted ban is the best way to resolve this conflict that the WBC began when it protested its first funeral.

A. Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church

Fred Phelps, the leader of the WBC, an independent Christian group based out of Topeka, Kansas, is the primary impetus to the recent legislation. The WBC has about one hundred members, most of whom are related to Phelps either by blood or through marriage. Their main belief and often-repeated message is that God is punishing the United States for tolerating homosexuality. They use picketing and protest demonstrations to voice this message. Although military funeral protesting has gained them the most attention, WBC has also picketed at

17 See infra Part II.D (discussing similar restrictions in other contexts).
18 See infra Part V (concluding that a constitutionally drafted ban is the best remedy in this conflict of rights); see also Associated Press 16933. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist stated, “[i]t’s a sad but necessary measure to protect what should be recognized by all reasonable people as a solemn, private and deeply sacred occasion.” Associated Press 16933; see also Adriana Colindres, Bill Would Limit Protests at Military Funerals, SPRINGFIELD STATE JOURNAL-REGISTRAR, Jan. 11, 2006, available at 2006 WL 666465 (quoting Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn of Illinois, who said, “[n]o grieving military family should be subjected to vile epithets and signs at the funeral service of their loved one who has made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.”).
19 Westboro, supra note 2. Phelps has had a long history of political involvement, trying to advocate his anti-homosexual message. Id. He gained national attention as the leader of this controversial group in 1998 when WBC picketed the funeral of Matthew Shepard, a homosexual hate crime victim. Id. His family, many of whom are lawyers like Phelps, makes up a large portion of WBC members and takes an active role in demonstrations. Id. Phelps was disbarred in 1979 in Kansas and has been arrested and charged with several crimes. Id.
20 See generally Westboro, supra notes 2, 19.
21 Westboro, supra note 2. According to WBC’s beliefs, events and deaths caused by 9/11, the Iraq War, and Hurricane Katrina are punishments from God because the U.S. tolerates homosexuality. Id.
22 Westboro, supra note 2. Past pickets have included gay pride gatherings, political events, Starbucks openings, memorials for 9/11 and Sage Mine victims, and funerals of homosexuals and veterans. Id. WBC posts a weekly picket schedule. See www.godhatesfags.com/fliers/Picket_Information.html (last visited Sept. 19, 2007). WBC also provides several other websites where information about their beliefs and photos of past demonstrations can be seen. Westboro, supra note 2 (referencing www.godhatesamerica.com, www.hatemongers.com, and www.thesignsofthetimes.net); see also Judy Keen, Funeral Protestors Say Laws Can’t Silence Them[ ] Their Belief: Troops Dying Because USA Tolerates Gays, USA TODAY, Sept. 14, 2006, available at 2006 WL 15933998 [hereinafter Keen] (discussing WBC picketing for over fifteen years at schools, churches, and funerals).
non-military funerals and even hospitals and hotels in order to spread its message and beliefs.23

WBC’s songs, messages on placards, and choices of places to protest homosexuality have brought it media attention, criticism, and, now, restrictive legislation.24 Since their first military funeral protest in June of 2005, WBC members have protested 162 funerals.25 Although their tactics are controversial and the source of inspiration for funeral protest laws, WBC members argue that their speech is protected and that the bans are content-based violations of the First Amendment.26 Despite
new laws and unwelcoming communities, WBC members believe they have been successful in getting their message across.\textsuperscript{27} The Patriot Guard Riders, a group of motorcyclists who oppose WBC picketers at funerals, and local public figures have taken matters into their own hands and have tried to address WBC’s funeral protesting in their own ways.\textsuperscript{28} In addition, other remedies to curb funeral protesting include using the tort system or enhancing already existing disturbing the peace statutes.\textsuperscript{29} However, since WBC members feel strongly about their message and First Amendment rights to continue picketing, funeral

Phelps-Roper said, “[t]hey’re going to give away rights that they claim these soldiers have died for? They’re going to spit in their graves - for what? Some words?” Associated Press 16532, \textsuperscript{supra}

\textsuperscript{27} See generally Keen, \textsuperscript{supra} note 22. WBC pickets as many as three funerals a week and, since August of 2006, has targeted fifteen funerals in thirteen states. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{28} Associated Press 16614, \textsuperscript{supra} note 8. The Patriot Guard Riders are a group of motorcyclists who attempt to overshadow the anti-gay protestors with flags, patriotic messages, and chants. \textit{Id.} See Keen, \textsuperscript{supra} note 22 (noting that there are 53,000 Patriot Guard Riders nation-wide); Ryan Lenz, \textit{Motorcyclists Roll to Soldier Funerals to Drown Out Protestors}, \textit{STARTTRIBUNE}, Feb. 21, 2006, http://www.starttribune.com/484/v-print/story/260171.html (last visited Oct. 7, 2007). As Kentucky Patriot Guard Rider, Dan Woodrick, stated, “[w]hen a total stranger gets on a motorcycle in the middle of winter and drives 300 miles to hold a flag, that makes a powerful statement.” Lenz, \textit{supra}; see also Jacques Steinberg, \textit{Air Time Instead of Funeral Protest}, \textit{N.Y. TIMES}, Oct. 6, 2006, at A14. Talk-radio show host Mike Gallagher approached the matter somewhat differently—by giving WBC almost an hour of air time on October 5, 2006, for their written promise not to picket the funerals of five young girls killed that week in their Pennsylvania school by a gunman. Steinberg, \textit{supra}. See also McDonough, \textit{supra} note 24 (stating that legislation alone is unlikely to stop WBC protestors who are very cautious and notify law enforcement and the media in advance, follow directions, and agree on a time and location for their protest demonstrations). But see Associated Press 16614 (explaining that WBC cancelled funeral demonstrations in Indiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin in March of 2006, all of which had new funeral protest legislation).

\textsuperscript{29} See Snyder, 2006 WL 3081106 (discussing the Snyder lawsuit’s claims of emotional distress due to WBC protesting). However, suits are time-consuming and costly. See \textit{Funeral Protest: Court Asked For Repayment}, \textit{YORK DAILY RECORD}, Aug. 30, 2006, http://www.ydr.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?article=425993 (last visited Sept. 4, 2006) (stating that it took Snyder more than twenty times to serve WBC with fees of almost $6,000 and that he filed a motion to recover those fees in a federal defamation suit against WBC for protesting his son’s March funeral); McDonough, \textit{supra} note 24, at 16 (noting how, according to experts, if the bans enhance disturbing the peace statutes and are narrowly drafted they are more likely to be upheld). Although these options may be less intrusive on speech, funeral protest bans will be more effective and put the burden of bringing a lawsuit on the protestors like the WBC. But see Alan K. Chen, \textit{Statutory Speech Bubbles, First Amendment Overbreadth, and Improper Legislative Purpose}, 38 \textit{HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV.} 31, 90 (2003) [hereinafter Chen] (“Continuing First Amendment doctrine on its current path will inevitably lead to more superficially neutral attempts to target speech regulations.”).
protest bans, if constitutionally drafted, are the most effective way to resolve this conflict of rights.30

B. Current State Funeral Protest Bans

The funeral protest bans recently passed in many states, within a relatively short time, are the result of legislative concern about protecting the privacy of mourning families and preventing emotional distress at funerals caused by any protestors.31 Support for these bills crosses party lines, which allows them quick passage.32 Most of the protest bans include distance and time requirements surrounding funeral demonstrations, as well as serious punishments against violators that include hefty fines and even jail time.33 To provide a sampling of legislation and different tactics states have used, the following key states are first generally discussed and then later compared: Kansas, Indiana,

30 McDonough, supra note 24. Shirley Phelps-Roper has stated, “[i]f we were standing out there with signs that say, ‘God Bless America,’ we would not be having this conversation.” Id.; 10 KWTX, supra note 5. WBC members held signs that said “Thank God for Dead Soldiers” and “Bush killed them” three hundred feet away from Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day, 2006, when Bush signed the “Respect for America’s Fallen Heroes Act.” 10 KWTX, supra note 5.


32 38 U.S.C. § 2413. The Act was introduced in the House on March 29, 2006; considered and passed on May 9, 2006; considered in the Senate and presented to the President on May 25, 2006; and signed on Memorial Day, 2006, with a total of 207 co-sponsors (99 Democrats and 108 Republicans). Id. See generally Part II.B (describing similar cross-party sponsorship and expediting of bills as seen in the states); The Associated Press, Iowa Governor Signs Bill Restricting Funeral Protests, Apr. 18, 2006, http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=16779 (last visited Sept. 4, 2006) (noting that the Iowa Governor enacted the law one day before a planned funeral picket by the Westboro Baptist Church); Associated Press 16532, supra note 26 (explaining that the Missouri bill took effect as soon as the Governor signed it); Associated Press 16301, supra note 7 (stating that no one testified against the funeral protest legislation in the Indiana committee hearing, and it was endorsed unanimously).

33 See infra notes 35-53 and accompanying text.
Illinois, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Maryland, Ohio, Florida, South Dakota, Missouri, and Kentucky.34

Kansas, WBC’s home state, is one example of a state that already had a law banning funeral demonstrations, but it was ultimately found unconstitutionally vague.35 The newly enacted bill, passed almost a decade later, bans picketing and protest marches within 300 feet of a funeral service, except for public places within the buffer zone, for one hour before and two hours after the funeral service, and violations are a misdemeanor.36 Similar distance and time restrictions were enacted in other states.37

34 See infra notes 35-53 and accompanying text.
35 Associated Press 16354, supra note 23; The Associated Press, Legislators Propose Bills Barring Protests at Funerals, Nov. 14, 2005, http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=16064 [hereinafter Associated Press 16064] (last visited Sept. 4, 2006). In Kansas, a 1995 law prohibiting similar protesting outside of funerals was found to be too vague. Associated Press 16064, supra. However, by later including time restrictions, a similar law was enacted. Id.; see also Hudson, supra note 3 (referring to the same law and stating that Phelps challenged a Kansas Picketing Act in the 1990s that later was ruled by a federal judge as unconstitutionally vague because of its terms “before” and “after” a funeral instead of specific time restrictions).
36 Associated Press 16532, supra note 32; Kan. S. 421. The bill, as of October 7, 2006, read:
(1) “Funeral” means any ceremony, procession or memorial service in connection with the death of a person.
(2) “Picketing” means protest activities engaged in by a person or persons stationed before or about a cemetery, mortuary, church or other location where a funeral is held or conducted within one hour prior to, during and two hours following the commencement of a funeral.
(e) It is unlawful for any person to:
(1) engage in picketing or a directed protest march at any public location within 300 yards of any entrance to any cemetery, church, mortuary or other location where a funeral is held or conducted within one hour prior to, during and two hours following the commencement of a funeral; or
(2) obstruct or prevent the intended uses of a public street, public sidewalk or other public space while engaged in picketing or a directed protest, as described in subsection (1).
Kan. S. 421 (emphasis in original). Punishment for violators may include a Class B misdemeanor and assessment of damages and attorney fees. Id.
For example, on March 2, 2006, the Indiana legislature enhanced its disorderly conduct statute to make picketing within 500 feet of a cemetery or burial a Class D felony.\footnote{Hudson, supra note 3; Associated Press 16584 (stating that it is disorderly conduct to protest within 500 feet of a funeral, procession, burial, or viewing, punishable as a felony offense with six months to three years in prison and a $10,000 fine); see also IND. CODE § 35-45-1-3 (2006), available at http://www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2006/SE/SE0005.1.html. The statute states:

\begin{enumerate}
\item A person who recklessly, knowingly, or intentionally:
\begin{enumerate}
\item engages in fighting or in tumultuous conduct;
\item makes unreasonable noise and continues to do so after being asked to stop; or
\item disrupts a lawful assembly of persons; commits disorderly conduct, a Class B misdemeanor.
\end{enumerate}
\item The offense described in subsection (a) is a Class D felony if it:
\begin{enumerate}
\item is committed within five hundred (500) feet of:
\begin{enumerate}
\item the location where a burial is being performed;
\item a funeral procession, if the person described in subsection (a) knows that the funeral procession is taking place; or
\item a building in which:
\begin{enumerate}
\item a funeral or memorial service; or
\item the viewing of a deceased person; is being conducted; and
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
\item adversely affects the funeral, burial, viewing, funeral procession, or memorial service.
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

\begin{enumerate}
\item “Funeral” means the ceremonies, rituals, processions, and memorial services held at a funeral site in connection with the burial, cremation, or memorial of a deceased person.
\item “Funeral site” means a church, synagogue, mosque, funeral home, mortuary, cemetery, gravesite, mausoleum, or other place at which a funeral is conducted or is scheduled to be conducted within the next 30 minutes or has been conducted within the last 30 minutes.
\item A person commits the offense of disorderly conduct at a funeral or memorial service when he or she:
\begin{enumerate}
\item engages, with knowledge of the existence of a funeral site, in any loud singing, playing of music, chanting, whistling, yelling,
Funeral Protest Bans

2006, individuals are prohibited from loud protests or displaying visual images that convey fighting words within 500 feet of a funeral from one hour before to one hour after a funeral.\(^{40}\) Nebraska introduced an amendment expanding its state’s anti-picketing law to include any picketing within 100 feet of any funeral being conducted.\(^{41}\) Similarly, an Oklahoma act signed into law on March 6, 2006, prohibits protests within one hour prior and two hours after funerals.\(^{42}\) In Maryland,

or noisemaking with, or without, noise amplification including, but not limited to, bullhorns, auto horns, and microphones within 200 feet of any ingress or egress of that funeral site, where the volume of such singing, music, chanting, whistling, yelling, or noisemaking is likely to be audible at and disturbing to the funeral site;
(2) displays with knowledge of the existence of a funeral site and within 200 feet of any ingress or egress of that funeral site, any visual images that convey fighting words or actual or veiled threats against any other person; or
(3) with knowledge of the existence of a funeral site, knowingly obstructs, hinders, impedes, or blocks another person’s entry to or exit from that funeral site or a facility containing that funeral site, except that the owner or occupant of property may take lawful actions to exclude others from that property.


\hspace{1cm} 947.011 Disrupting a funeral or memorial service.

\hspace{1cm} (1) In this section:

\hspace{2cm} (a) “Facility” includes a cemetery in which a funeral or memorial service takes place.

\hspace{2cm} (b) “Funeral or memorial service” includes a wake or a burial, as defined in s. 157.061 (1), but does not include a service that is not intended to honor or commemorate one or more specific decedents.

\hspace{2cm} (2) . . .

\hspace{2cm} (a) No person may do any of the following during a funeral or memorial service, during the 60 minutes immediately preceding the scheduled starting time of a funeral or memorial service if a starting time has been scheduled, or during the 60 minutes immediately following a funeral or memorial service:

\hspace{3cm} 1. Engage in conduct that is prohibited . . . within 500 feet of any entrance to a facility being used for the service with the intent to disrupt the service.

\hspace{3cm} 2. Intentionally block access to a facility being used for the service.

\(^{41}\) Hudson, \textit{supra} note 3.

\(^{42}\) \textit{Id.}; see also S. 1020, 50th Leg., 2d Sess. (Okla. 2006), available at http://webserver1.lsb.state.ok.us/2005-06SB/SB1020_int.rtf. Oklahoma’s law states, in part:

\hspace{1cm} B. The purposes of this section are to:
House Bill 850 would ban funeral protests within an hour prior to the funeral, making it a crime to obstruct mourners from funerals or burials, and making violations a misdemeanor. Finally, Ohio bans picketing or any other protest activity within 300 feet of a funeral for one hour before and after a funeral. The aforementioned states exemplify the current trend in legislation.

Some state legislation, however, has caused more controversy. For example, Florida uses more general language and punishes anyone who

1. Protect the privacy of grieving families within one hour prior to, during and two (2) hours following the commencement of funerals; and
2. Preserve the peaceful character of cemeteries, mortuaries and churches within one hour prior to, during and two (2) hours following the commencement of funerals.

C. As used in this section:
1. “Funeral” means the ceremonies, processions and memorial services held in connection with the burial or cremation of the dead; and
2. “Picketing” means protest activities engaged in by a person or persons within five hundred (500) feet of a cemetery, mortuary or church within one hour prior to, during and two (2) hours following the commencement of a funeral.

S. 1020, 50th Leg., 2d Sess. (Okla. 2006). Violations may carry a fine up to $500 dollars, jail up to thirty days, or both. Id. 43 Associated Press 16532, supra note 26; see also H. R. 850, 2006 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Md. 2006), available at http://mlis.state.md.us/2006rs/bills/hb/hb0850f.pdf. The Maryland law provides:

(A) A person may not, for 60 minutes immediately preceding a funeral, burial, memorial service, or funeral procession that has a scheduled starting time, or during the 60 minutes immediately following a funeral or memorial service:
   (1) Knowingly obstruct, hinder, impede, or block another person’s entry to or exit from the funeral, burial, memorial service, or funeral procession; or
   (2) Display a visual image that conveys fighting words against another person within 500 feet of:
      (i) An entrance to a funeral, burial or memorial service; or
      (ii) A funeral procession.
(B) A person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 90 days or a fine not exceeding $1,000 or both.


[N]o person shall picket or engage in other protest activities, nor shall any association or corporation cause to be picketed picketing or other protest activities to occur, within three hundred feet of any residence, cemetery, funeral home, church, synagogue, or other establishment during or within one hour before and during or one hour after the
“willfully interrupts or disturbs” a military funeral with a misdemeanor charge. On February 13, 2006, South Dakota signed a bill prohibiting picketing likely to cause emotional distress to a grieving family within 1,000 feet, one hour before to one hour after a funeral service. South Dakota’s distance requirement is one of the most extreme. Similarly, in conducting of an actual funeral or burial service at such that place. No person shall picket or engage in other protest activities, nor shall any association or corporation cause picketing or other protest activities to occur, within three hundred feet of any funeral procession. As used in this section, “other protest activities” means any action that is disruptive or undertaken to disrupt or disturb a funeral or burial service or a funeral procession.

Id. (underlining and striking as it appears in the bill to reflect the final version passed).

The Florida bill states:
(2) Whoever willfully interrupts or disturbs any assembly of people met for the purpose of acknowledging the death of an individual with a military funeral honors detail pursuant to 10 U.S.C. s. 1491 commits a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082 or s. 775.083.

Id.

The South Dakota legislature passed the law in only a couple of hours and included language that made it effective upon the Governor’s signature in order to cover upcoming funerals that week. Associated Press 16475, supra note 31.

S.D. S. 156 (setting South Dakota’s distance restriction at 1,000 feet).
Missouri, the governor signed the state’s first protest ban in February 2006, but later signed a second law, as a preventative measure, to get around any potential future lawsuits since the first ban did not specify a certain distance, making it susceptible to a possible vagueness challenge.49 Finally, Kentucky signed a law on March 27, 2006, that bans protestors within 300 feet of funerals, burial services, and memorial services.50

To summarize the preceding sampling of legislation, distance requirements ranged from 100 feet in Nebraska, to 300 feet in Kansas,

49 Associated Press 16532, supra note 32. The newer ban expands the definition of a funeral to cover them no matter where they are held and sets a distance limit of 300 feet from funeral proceedings. Id. Otherwise, it is similar to the previous ban and has the same time limit of sixty minutes before and after a funeral. Id.; see MO. REV. STAT. § 578.501 (West 2006).

1. This section shall be known as ‘Spc. Edward Lee Myers’ Law.’
2. It shall be unlawful for any person to engage in picketing or other protest activities in front of or about any location at which a funeral is held, within one hour prior to the commencement of any funeral, and until one hour following the cessation of any funeral . . .
3. For the purposes of this section, “funeral” means the ceremonies, processions and memorial services held in connection with the burial or cremation of the dead.

MO. REV. STAT. § 578.501; see also infra note 68 and accompanying text (likening the Missouri statute to those of Wisconsin, Ohio, and South Dakota).


(1) A person is guilty of interference with a funeral when he or she at any time on any day:

(a) Blocks, impedes, inhibits, or in any other manner obstructs or interferes with access into or from any building or parking lot of a building in which a funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial is being conducted, or any burial plot or the parking lot of the cemetery in which a funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial is being conducted;
(b) Congregates, pickets, patrols, demonstrates, or enters on that portion of a public right-of-way or private property that is within three hundred (300) feet of an event specified in paragraph (a) of this subsection, or
(c) Without authorization from the family of the deceased or person conducting the service, during a funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial:

1. Sings, chants, whistles, shouts, yells, or uses a bullhorn, auto horn, sound amplification equipment, or other sounds or images observable to or within earshot of participants in the funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial; or
2. Distributes literature or any other item.

Id. Violation is a Class B misdemeanor. Id.; see Hudson, supra note 3; Associated Press 16414, supra note 24 (remarking on how Kentucky senators expedited the bill).
Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, and Kentucky, to 500 feet in Indiana and Wisconsin; and even to 1,000 feet in South Dakota.\footnote{See supra notes 34-44 and accompanying text.} There were differences in time restrictions as well.\footnote{See supra notes 34-50 and accompanying text.} For example, Kansas and Oklahoma restricted protesting one hour before and two hours after a funeral service, while Wisconsin, Ohio, South Dakota, and Missouri only restrict for one hour before and after.\footnote{See supra notes 34, 36, 40, 42, 44, 47, and 49 and accompanying text.} Unlike the common time restrictions in most states, Kentucky’s is an example of a ban with a vague time restriction, stating “at any time on any day.”\footnote{See supra note 50.} Penalties range from violations constituting a misdemeanor, in Kansas, Maryland, and Kentucky, to a Class D felony in Indiana.\footnote{Compare supra notes 33, 36, 42, 43, and 46-48 and accompanying text, with supra note 38 and accompanying text (noting, for instance, that Oklahoma has a $500 fine or 30 days in jail and Maryland sets a $1,000 fine and 90 days in jail).}

Beyond differences among the states, some states even differ from the Federal Heroes Act.\footnote{See supra note 6 and accompanying text.} Although the Federal Heroes Act is limited to military funerals because of jurisdiction issues, it can still serve as sample legislation for states that ban protests at all funerals.\footnote{Associated Press 16933, supra note 3.} The Heroes Act distance requirement bans protestors 300 feet from a national cemetery or 150 feet from a route of ingress or egress to the cemetery.\footnote{38 U.S.C. § 2413.} Its time restriction is one hour before to one hour after a funeral, memorial service, or ceremony.\footnote{Id.} The penalty can be up to one year in prison, a fine, or both.\footnote{Id.} Having compared and contrasted the bans, it is obvious that the states and their legislation are not uniform and that many even differ from the federal bill.\footnote{See supra notes 31-60 and accompanying text.}

The lack of uniformity among state bans may be attributed to legislatures acting too quickly and it foreshadows the need for a model statute.\footnote{Dean Mundy, \textit{Funeral Protest Law is Misguided}, MILWAUKEE J. SENTINEL, Mar. 19, 2005, http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=408970 (last visited Sept. 4, 2006) (arguing that legislators should wait before quickly enacting a law to see how big of a problem they are actually addressing).} One commentator stated, “[b]ut to see a news article one day and have a law enacted shortly thereafter makes it look as though little
thought or study are being done." The constitutional issues that these laws raise may be taking a back seat to public policy concerns, but such issues will eventually rise to the surface through court challenges. Both WBC and the American Civil Liberties Union ("ACLU") plan to challenge these laws.

In fact, Kentucky and Missouri are the first states to face constitutional challenges to their statutes in court. As previously stated, both states have distance requirements of 300 feet. Missouri restricts protesting for one hour before and after a funeral. However, Kentucky’s restriction is vaguer, stipulating “at any time on any day.” In addition, Kentucky has a very broad and encompassing definition of

---

63 Id.
64 Collins, supra note 3 (arguing that whether funeral protest bans violate the First Amendment is being overlooked in the recent trend of federal and state laws); STAR TRIBUNE, supra note 23. Chuck Samuelson, executive director of the Minnesota American Civil Liberties Union stated, “[w]e generally don’t like these things and part of me says leave [him] alone and he’ll go away. But this is not a constitutional issue, it’s a public policy issue.” STAR TRIBUNE, supra note 23; see also Worldwide Religious News, Judge Temporarily Suspends Funeral Protest Ban, Sept. 27, 2006, http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?idd=22859&con=&sec=36 (last visited Oct. 1, 2007) (describing how U.S. District Judge Karen Caldwell temporarily suspended Kentucky’s funeral protest ban, reasoning: “[t]he zone is large enough that it would restrict communications intended for the general public on a matter completely unrelated to the funeral as well as messages targeted at funeral participants.”).
65 McDonough, supra note 24.
66 The Associated Press, ACLU Lawsuit Challenges Kentucky Funeral-Protest Law, May 2, 2006, http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=16841 (last visited Oct. 1, 2007). On May 1, 2006, the ACLU filed a federal lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in Frankfort, Kentucky, challenging the new state law that prohibits protestors within 300 feet of funerals, memorial services, wakes, and burials, as well as preventing the use of bullhorns; punishable as disorderly conduct and up to a year in jail. Id.; see Phelps-Roper v. Nixon, No. 06-4156-CV-C-FJG, 2007 WL 273437, at *3 (W.D. Mo. Jan. 26, 2007) (involving a complaint against Missouri statute sections 578.501-502, of which section 578.502 is a backup that is to become effective if subsection 501 would be held unconstitutional, even though its only difference from the former version is that it changes “in front of or about” language to “three hundred feet”). Phelps-Roper is claiming that the statutes infringe on individual speech, religious liberty, and assembly rights, arguing that they are unconstitutional, and is seeking preliminary and permanent injunctions prohibiting enforcement of the statutes, citing a “lack of clarity about what speech is criminal” and complaining that the WBC is “chilled in their efforts to engage in protected speech activities inspired by their religious beliefs.” Complaint at 2, Phelps-Roper v. Nixon, No. 06-4156-CV-C-NKL, 2007 WL 2515872 (W.D. Mo. July 21, 2006).
67 Ky. H.R. 333, 2006 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Ky. 2006); MO. REV. STAT. § 578.501; see also supra note 51 and accompanying text (noting that other states that have 300 foot distance requirements include Kansas, Illinois, and Ohio).
68 MO. REV. STAT. § 578.501; see also supra note 52 (noting other states that have time restrictions of one hour before and after, including Wisconsin, Ohio, and South Dakota).
picketing and protest activity.\textsuperscript{70} A court may find both of these vague sections within the Kentucky statute problematic.\textsuperscript{71} Although Missouri’s statute shares common threads with many other states, its legislature did anticipate problems, leading to the passage of its most recent statute with the 300 foot distance requirement as “backup” legislation in case the previous language of “in front of or about” would be held unconstitutionally vague.\textsuperscript{72} These constitutional challenges and legislative concerns require an overview of First Amendment doctrine.

C. First Amendment Overview

Funeral protest bans implicate the First Amendment by restricting speech.\textsuperscript{73} Although WBC and its tactics do not garner much public support, they may find all the support they need in the First Amendment.\textsuperscript{74} First Amendment analysis is always wary of the “slippery slope” when restricting speech.\textsuperscript{75} As Tony Rothert, an ACLU member stated, “[t]oday it’s a group we don’t like. Tomorrow it could be us that [sic] are silenced.”\textsuperscript{76}

The First Amendment protects offensive and repugnant speech.\textsuperscript{77} However, the First Amendment does not provide an absolute right to speech.\textsuperscript{78} First Amendment challenges can address whether a speech

\textsuperscript{70} Id.; see also infra note 168 (providing similar Texas code definitions).
\textsuperscript{71} Olmer v. City of Lincoln, 192 F.3d 1176 (8th Cir. 1999) (holding a vague and overbroad anti-picketing ordinance unconstitutional). See generally infra Part III.A.3 (providing analysis of overbreadth and vagueness doctrine).
\textsuperscript{72} See supra note 66 (discussing Missouri’s backup legislation); Phelps-Roper v. Nixon, No. 06-4156-CV-C-FJG, 2007 WL 273437, at *1, *4 (W.D. Mo. Jan. 26, 2007) (noting plaintiff’s allegations that Missouri statute sections 578.501 and 578.502 infringe on speech, religious liberty, and assembly rights are targeted at WBC’s message, are vague, are not narrowly tailored, and convey information about time and routes that are not posted in a manner that allows for compliance).
\textsuperscript{73} See generally supra notes 8 and 13 and accompanying text (providing constitutional arguments as well as the text of the First Amendment).
\textsuperscript{74} STARTRIBUNE, supra note 23 (reporting on how the general public and hosts of a Minnesota radio show publicly condemned a recent WBC protest for hours on end); Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703, 715 (2000) (stating: “The fact that the messages conveyed by those communications may be offensive to their recipients does not deprive them of constitutional protection.”).
\textsuperscript{75} See generally Koen, supra note 22.
\textsuperscript{76} Id.
\textsuperscript{77} Cohen v. California, 403 U.S. 15 (1971) (holding that wearing a jacket that said “Fuck the Draft” in a courthouse to protest the Vietnam War was constitutional because offensive words are protected by the First Amendment).
\textsuperscript{78} Konigsberg v. State Bar of California, 366 U.S. 36, 49 (1961) (declaring that the freedom of speech and association are not “absolutes”); Collins, supra note 3 (holding that
restrictive law targets a certain group or content, argue that a restriction is not a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction, facially challenge vague or overbroad terms, or try to characterize the forum.\(^79\)

Determining whether a speech restrictive law is content-based or content-neutral on its face sets the standard for analyzing the law.\(^80\) If a law is content-based, meaning the subject matter, message, or particular idea is restricted, it must satisfy strict scrutiny to survive a First Amendment challenge.\(^81\) Strict scrutiny requires a compelling government interest and narrowly tailored means.\(^82\) Strict scrutiny is a heavy burden to satisfy and typically requires that the regulation is necessary to achieve a compelling interest that cannot be achieved through any less intrusive means.\(^83\)

If a law is content-neutral, however, the government only has to meet intermediate scrutiny, which is a lesser burden and merely requires an important government interest and means that are no broader than necessary.\(^84\) Under intermediate scrutiny, the regulations must be narrowly tailored to serve a significant interest.\(^85\) Further, if a law is

\(^79\) See infra notes 80-93 and accompanying text; see also Part III.A (analyzing the constitutional strengths and weaknesses in current statutory and regulatory drafting).

\(^80\) Boos v. Barry, 485 U.S. 312 (1988) (holding that if a restriction on speech is content-based, it must meet strict scrutiny to survive a First Amendment challenge).\(^81\) Strict scrutiny requires a compelling government interest and narrowly tailored means; Hudson, supra note 3 (quoting Robert D. Richards’s statement: “Given that the expression at issue, ‘funeral protest,’ could easily be interpreted as a content-based restriction, the government will likely have a tough time defending the restriction.”).

\(^81\) Turner Broad. v. FCC, 512 U.S. 622, 642 (1994); Police Dep’t of Chicago v. Mosley, 408 U.S. 92, 95 (1972) (“[A]bove all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter, or its content.”). ERWIN CHEMERINSKY, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 1054 (2d ed. 2005).


\(^84\) Ward v. Rock Against Racism, 491 U.S. 781, 800 (1989) (“So long as the means chosen are not substantially broader than necessary to achieve the government’s interest, however, the regulation will not be invalid simply because a court concludes that the government’s interest could be adequately served by some less-speech-restrictive alternative.”). CHEMERINSKY, supra note 81, at 1054. Intermediate scrutiny requires an important government interest. CHEMERINSKY, supra note 81, at 1054. In order to be content-neutral, a speech regulation must be viewpoint neutral and subject matter neutral. Id. at 1058.

\(^85\) Consol. Edison Co. v. Pub. Serv. Comm’n, 447 U.S. 530, 535-36 (1980) (stating that the level of scrutiny for time, place, and manner restrictions requires that alternative channels of communication are also left open).
content-neutral, government can limit speech with reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, which would allow the government to regulate speech even in a public forum, such as the sidewalks and streets around a funeral or cemetery.86

In addition, laws can be facially challenged because of their vagueness or substantial over-breadth. A law is unconstitutionally vague if it is ambiguous and a reasonable person cannot tell what speech is allowed or prohibited.88 Similarly, a law is unconstitutionally overbroad if it regulates substantially more speech than the Constitution allows and is unconstitutional when applied to others.89 If facial challenges such as these are successful, the entire law is invalidated.90

Finally, since the type of forum where the speech takes place affects the level of scrutiny, it is necessary to examine the places where laws are trying to regulate speech.91 Public forums, such as sidewalks and parks,

86 Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703 (2000) (holding that a statute regulating speech within one hundred feet of the entrance to any health care facility is a valid time, place, and manner regulation that is content-neutral, narrowly tailored, and leaves open alternative channels of communication); Clark v. Cmty. for Creative Non-Violence, 468 U.S. 288 (1984) (holding that protestors could not sleep in the park); Perry Educ. Ass’n v. Perry Local Educators’ Ass’n, 460 U.S. 37, 45 (1983); Consol. Edison Co., 447 U.S. at 533-36; see also Grayned v. Rockford, 408 U.S. 104 (1972) (restricting noise and disruptions around schools in session); Kovacs v. Cooper, 336 U.S. 77 (1949) (restricting sound devices on trucks); CHEMERINSKY, supra note 81, at 1356-57 (citing Hill, 530 U.S. 703, in which the Court upheld various regulations creating buffer zones around abortion clinics as reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions). But see United States v. Grace, 461 U.S. 171 (1983). In that case, the Court declared a speech restriction on the public sidewalks around the Supreme Court building unconstitutional because a total ban on speech was unnecessary to further the goal of preventing disruption of court proceedings. Id.
87 Schad v. Borough of Mount Ephraim, 452 U.S. 61 (1981) (finding that an ordinance was overbroad because it prohibited all forms of live entertainment); Coates v. City of Cincinnati, 402 U.S. 611 (1971) (holding that a particular ordinance was vague because there was an unascertainable standard and broad because it punished protected conduct and speech, making it facially invalid).
88 Coates, 402 U.S. at 611; CHEMERINSKY, supra note 81, at 1085.
89 CHEMERINSKY, supra note 81, at 1087.
90 Id. at 1084.
91 Perry Educ. Ass’n, 460 U.S. at 44 (1983); Dep’t of the City of Chicago v. Mosley, 408 U.S. 92 (1972) (holding that government regulation of speech in public places must be content-neutral or else it has to meet strict scrutiny); CHEMERINSKY, supra note 81, at 1342 (“[T]here generally is no right to use private property for speech purposes . . . there is no state action, and the Constitution does not apply”); Phelps, supra note 3 (stating that courts first look at the location of the protestors); Timothy Zick, Speech and Spatial Tactics, 84 Tex. L. Rev. 581, 584 (2006) (referring to free speech, buffer, and protest zones used around abortion clinics, political conventions, campuses, and funerals). “Governments have learned to manipulate geography in a manner that now seriously threatens basic First Amendment principles.” Zick, supra.
are government property that the government must make available for speech.92 However, the government can still regulate speech in a public forum, as long as the regulation is content-neutral and is a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction.93

D. Similar Speech Restrictions in Other Contexts

Reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, like the recent funeral protest bans, have been challenged in court in other contexts and thus are helpful to examine, since a court has yet to rule on the constitutionality of a funeral protest ban.94 Several Supreme Court abortion cases regarding buffer zones and restrictions around clinics provide helpful insight into how a court may analyze the constitutionality of funeral protest laws.95 These cases provide helpful tools to construct a model statute, by providing language, distance, and time restrictions that have been upheld and the Supreme Court reasoning behind its decisions.96

In Hill v. Colorado,97 a 1993 Colorado law required protestors who were within one hundred feet of an abortion clinic to stay eight feet away from any person who was entering or exiting the clinic.98 The Court found that the statute was a content-neutral place regulation and upheld the law as constitutional.99 Similarly, in Madsen v. Women’s Health Center,100 the Court found that a thirty-six foot buffer zone in front of a clinic that prohibited any protest or demonstration was constitutional.101 However, in Schenck v. Pro-Choice Network of W.N.Y.,102 the Court held that a fifteen foot “floating” buffer zone around any vehicle or person entering or leaving a clinic was unconstitutional.103 The Court reasoned

93 See infra Part II.D (discussing similar speech restrictions in other contexts).
94 See infra notes 95-110 and accompanying text.
96 See infra Part IV (offering a model statute based on Part III’s analysis).
97 Hill, 530 U.S. at 703.
98 Id. (reasoning that the law was a valid time, place, and manner restriction and that it was narrowly tailored and allowed enough alternative channels of communication).
99 Id. (reasoning that the right to access a health facility was an important interest).
100 Madsen, 512 U.S. at 753.
101 Id.
103 519 U.S. 357, 377 (1997). “We uphold the provisions imposing ‘fixed bubble’ or ‘fixed buffer zone’ limitations, as hereinafter described, but hold that the provisions imposing ‘floating bubble’ or ‘floating buffer zone’ limitations violate the First Amendment.” Id. at 361.
that this was overbroad since it could apply to protestors on public sidewalks and curbs and would be very hard to enforce.\(^\text{104}\)

One final abortion case revolves around residential picketing.\(^\text{105}\) In Frisby v. Schultz, anti-abortion protestors targeted a doctor’s home and wanted to picket on the public street outside of his house.\(^\text{106}\) The Court held that the city ordinance restricting residential picketing was constitutional, despite lower courts’ holding and a strong dissent by several Justices.\(^\text{107}\) The Court relied heavily on the privacy of the home and the fact that the residents are “captive audiences” in their homes.\(^\text{108}\)

Although not as persuasive as the Supreme Court reasoning in the abortion context, two lower court cases from the 1990’s regarding picketing outside of churches are helpful for analyzing the recent funeral protest bans.\(^\text{109}\) In St. David’s Episcopal Church v. Westboro Baptist Church, a church filed a petition to stop WBC from picketing around its property before, during, and after religious events.\(^\text{110}\) The Kansas Court of Appeals affirmed a thirty-six foot buffer zone around the church to the east, west, and north and 215 feet to the south from thirty minutes before to thirty minutes after an event, reasoning that protecting a person’s place of worship is a legitimate government interest.\(^\text{111}\)

\(^\text{104}\) Id. at 379 (“[W]e conclude that the floating buffer zones burden more speech than necessary to serve the relevant governmental interests.”).


\(^\text{106}\) 487 U.S. 474, 476 (1988). The ordinance stated: “It is unlawful for any person to engage in picketing before or about the residence or dwelling of any individual in the Town of Brookfield.” Id. at 477.

\(^\text{107}\) Id. at 488. The lower courts found that the ordinance was not narrowly tailored. Id. at 478. However, the Supreme Court more narrowly interpreted the ordinance to only include a single house and not a whole residential area and also to only include those listeners who could not avoid the speech. Id. at 482-88. But see id. at 494 (Brennan, J. dissenting) (arguing that the ordinance was not narrowly tailored and the city could go back and change the ordinance to only regulate the “number of residential picketers, the hours during which a residential picket may take place, or the noise level of such a picket”).

\(^\text{108}\) Id. at 487 (majority opinion). “Because the picketing prohibited by the Brookfield ordinance is speech directed primarily at those who are presumptively unwilling to receive it, the State has a substantial and justifiable interest in banning it.” Id. at 488.

\(^\text{109}\) See infra notes 110-11 and accompanying text. Since there has yet to be precedent directly on point drawing inferences, even from state and lower federal courts, provides some helpful information as to how courts may look at the recent funeral protest bans.


\(^\text{111}\) Id. at 551-52. St. David’s sued to stop picketing within thirty-six feet of the church to the east, west, and north and 215 feet to the south for thirty minutes before to thirty minutes after religious events like services, weddings, and funerals. Id. at 540. According to the Kansas Appellate Court, “the right of free exercise would be a hollow one if the
In contrast, in *Olmer v. City of Lincoln*, the Eighth Circuit held that a city ordinance restricting picketing outside religious places, with the same thirty-minute time restrictions as in *St. David’s*, was unconstitutional because it was not narrowly tailored. The court found that the ordinance banned speech directed at adults and not just children (who were the city’s main interest when making the regulation) and prohibited more speech than just that speech that damaged children.

The different stances and reasoning of the Supreme Court on similar restrictions in the abortion context, as well as lower court reasoning in the religious context, leave legislatures unsure of how to draft valid legislation and whether or not their laws will withstand constitutional

---

112 *Olmer v. City of Lincoln*, 192 F.3d 1176 (8th Cir. 1999).

113 *Id.* at 1180.

114 Id. at 1180 (“The ordinance purports to make the carrying of signs at the indicated times and places unlawful, no matter what the signs say or depict, and this prohibition is much broader than necessary . . . .”).
challenges, thus demonstrating the need for a model statute.\textsuperscript{115} State funeral protest bans are designed to balance the competing rights between protestors and mourners.\textsuperscript{116} The First Amendment protects speech, and precedent in other contexts sheds light on how such legislation should be drafted in order to survive future court challenges.\textsuperscript{117} The strengths and weaknesses in the drafting of current bans are analyzed below.\textsuperscript{118}

III. ANALYSIS

Part III applies the background information to determine whether the state funeral protest bans violate the First Amendment rights of protestors and what the proper balance of rights should be in current and future legislation.\textsuperscript{119} First, this Part analyzes the constitutionality of the bans by discussing content-neutrality, reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, vagueness and overbreadth, and forum.\textsuperscript{120} Then, it exposes the strengths and weaknesses of the funeral protest bans by drawing on similar restrictions in other contexts.\textsuperscript{121}

A. Are State Funeral Protest Bans Constitutional?

Recently passed state funeral protest bans implicate several constitutional concerns, including: content-neutrality, vagueness and overbreadth, and the scope of reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions. Although the bans have similar features, components, and drafting (each include items such as distance buffer zones, time restrictions, and penalties), the lack of uniformity among those features

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{115} See supra Part II.D. Compare Hill (530 U.S. 703), and Madsen (512 U.S. 753) (upholding the constitutionality of protest restrictions at one hundred feet, thirty-six feet, and an eight foot buffer zone), with Schenck (519 U.S. at 377, 379), and Olmer (192 F.3d at 1180) (declaring a fifteen-foot floating buffer zone unconstitutional and holding a restriction too broad since it regulated all forms of speech). See infra Part III.B (comparing state bans to the speech-restrictive bans from other contexts).
  \item \textsuperscript{116} See supra Part II.B (providing a discussion of state bans and the reasons behind their enactments).
  \item \textsuperscript{117} See supra Parts II.C and II.D (discussing First Amendment analysis and case law in other precedents).
  \item \textsuperscript{118} See infra Part III (analyzing the constitutionality of state funeral protest bans).
  \item \textsuperscript{119} See infra Parts III and IV (analyzing the constitutionality of the laws and providing a model statute).
  \item \textsuperscript{120} See infra Part III.A (discussing the constitutionality of the bans by analyzing whether the bans are content-neutral, set reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, and are not over-broad or vague).
  \item \textsuperscript{121} See infra Part III.B (comparing the drafting in state bans to the speech-restrictive bans from other contexts).
\end{itemize}
and components may be problematic. Since the legislation passed, roughly at the same time in many states and with little court precedent to guide the legislatures, the lack of uniformity may cause some states that exhibited poor drafting or more extreme measures to worry more about their statute’s constitutionality. As precedent in other contexts has highlighted, when restrictions are not carefully drafted or are too extreme, they often are found unconstitutional.

1. State Funeral Protest Bans Must Be Content-Neutral

In order for state funeral protest bans to survive constitutional challenges, they must be content-neutral. A content-neutral regulation does not discriminate against or target specific speech and is viewpoint and subject matter neutral. Despite generally having to meet a less stringent standard, it is important for a state funeral protest ban to be content-neutral since it would be unlikely for a court to find that such a ban satisfied strict scrutiny if it was content-based.

Paying some attention to the legislative intent behind these funeral protest bans is helpful to the analysis as well. In particular, it is necessary to determine whether the bans were created and directed toward WBC and its message, or rather to protect funerals in general from all protestors and demonstrations. The intent may impact

---

122 See generally supra Part II.B (discussing current state funeral protest bans); see also Hudson, supra note 3 (noting that the following states have passed legislation: Alabama, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin).

123 See supra notes 45-50 and 62-66 and accompanying text.

124 See supra notes 34 and 40-43 and accompanying text; see also Part II.D (discussing similar speech restrictions in other protest contexts).

125 See supra Part II.C; see also supra notes 73-93 (laying the foundation for a First Amendment analysis).

126 See supra notes 80-86 and accompanying text. See generally Part II.C (providing a First Amendment overview).

127 See supra note 121 and accompanying text. See generally Part II.C (First Amendment analysis framework).

128 See supra note 116 and accompanying text. See generally Part II.C (setting a First Amendment analysis framework).

129 See supra note 8; Associated Press 16414, supra note 24. WBC leader Fred Phelps told the Kansas Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee, “[w]e can’t be lawfully moved out of sight of our target audience. . . . You have no legitimate public interest here.” Associated Press 16414, supra note 24.
whether courts view the legislation as content-based. For example, Governor Tom Vilsack of Iowa plainly stated, in regard to WBC, “[t]hese protestors don’t reflect Iowa values, and their actions have no place in our state.” Similarly, Kentucky stated in its statute that disrupting military funerals was disgraceful and even warranted a declaration of emergency. Despite arguments that the recent legislation targets the WBC and its message, certain members of the U.S. Supreme Court have stated that legislative intent is not determinative of whether a law is content-neutral on its face. Although some of the bans were passed unusually quickly in anticipation of an upcoming WBC protest, making it easy to question the legislative intent, they have all been facially content-neutral. Content-neutrality is key to any model statute, as it allows for a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction.

Although the impetus behind much, if not all, of the legislation has been caused by WBC’s conduct of protesting funerals, and many legislators and citizens have opposed WBC’s acts and message, courts

130 David L. Hudson, Jr., Pastor’s Anti-Gay Actions Test Society’s Commitment to First Amendment, Oct. 16, 1998, http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=9482 (hereinafter Hudson II) (last visited Sept. 4, 2006) (describing how Tom McCoy, Vanderbilt law professor, stated at the time that WBC should have the right to express their message and that it was a form of political speech, despite general public feeling that a funeral is not an appropriate place). But see Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703, 715 (2000) (noting that the law was found content-neutral regardless of the triggering event). “Whether or not those interests justify the particular regulation at issue, they are unquestionably legitimate.” Id. at § 6.

131 Associated Press, supra note 32; see STARTRIBUNE, supra note 23 (stating that Minnesota representative Seifert said that the WBC demonstrations were against Minnesota values).

132 Ky. H.R. 333. “Whereas there is a disgraceful nationwide campaign to disrupt military funerals, and whereas this campaign may enter Kentucky at any time, an emergency is declared to exist, and this Act takes effect upon its passage and approval by the Governor or upon its otherwise becoming a law.” Id. at § 6.

133 Edwards v. Aguillard, 482 U.S. 578, 637 (1987) (Scalia, J., dissenting) (“To look for the sole purpose of even a single legislator is probably to look for something that does not exist.”) (emphasis in original); see also Chen, supra note 29 (“[T]he Court has repeatedly rejected direct judicial inquiries into legislative motive, even where there is substantial evidence that a facially neutral law might have been adopted for speech-restrictive reasons.”). But see Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah, 508 U.S. 520 (1993) (noting that, because the object of these ordinances was to suppress only one religion, the laws were struck down by the Court despite their neutrality); Collins, supra note 3 (stating that it is viewpoint-discrimination if the stated or actual purpose of the laws is to prohibit groups like the Westboro Baptist Church, but not Patriot Guard Riders); Associated Press 16301, supra note 7 (citing Geoffrey Stone from University of Chicago Law School as saying the Illinois law is unconstitutional because it is directed at the content of the speech and singles out certain protests).

134 See Mundy, supra note 62 and accompanying text (discussing the speed with which many of these bans were enacted).

135 See infra Part IV (providing a model statute).
generally look only to the statutory text to determine content-neutrality. Since most of the statutes prohibit all protesting and demonstrations, creating a general ban, they will likely be determined to be content-neutral. Nevertheless, the content-neutrality of these funeral protest bans is still being questioned. In addition, any state that allows some forms of demonstrations (like those of the Patriot Guard Riders), but not others (like WBC demonstrations), will have a hard time convincing a court that its regulation is content-neutral and an even harder time convincing that same court that its statute meets strict scrutiny.

The majority of the funeral protest bans are content-neutral. Beginning with the Respect for Fallen Heroes Act, their terms do not distinguish among different types of demonstrations and apply to all protestors no matter what their message may be. However, even the Fallen Heroes Act has a drafting weakness regarding content-neutrality. It states that no demonstrations can be carried out according to the various regulations “unless the demonstration has been approved,” and yet presents no guidelines on approval. This may lead to some content-based decisions in the future and is a drafting weakness that should be avoided by the states. Not taking after the weaknesses in the federal Act, all of the states sampled in this Note used content-

136 See supra Part II.A (discussing the WBC and its tactics); see also supra Part II.C (providing the framework for content-neutral regulations); supra note 123 and accompanying text.
137 Phelps, supra note 3, at 290.
138 Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703, 767 (2000) (Kennedy, J., dissenting) (“By confining the law’s application to the specific locations where the prohibited discourse occurs, the State has made a content-based determination.”); see also Hudson, supra note 3 (noting Richards’ statement, “[t]he other question I would have is what would happen if people who loved the deceased held up signs outside the church or funeral home saying, ‘We love you. We’ll miss you’. . . Would those folks face criminal charges? If not, there’s a viewpoint-based discrimination issue.”).
139 See Hudson, supra note 3 (stating that protection for a “grieving family” is not a compelling government interest). But see Phelps, supra note 3, at 290 (stating that protecting the right to worship is an important government interest). See generally supra Part II.C.
140 See supra Part II.B (providing a sampling of current state funeral protest bans).
141 See supra notes 5-8 and accompanying text.
142 See infra notes 144-45 (showing drafting weaknesses in the Fallen Heroes Act).
143 See 38 U.S.C. § 2413 (“No person may carry out – (1) a demonstration on the property of a cemetery under the control of the National Cemetery Administration . . . unless the demonstration has been approved by the cemetery superintendent or the director of the property on which the cemetery is located.”).
144 See infra Part IV (providing a model statute based on analyzing strengths and weaknesses in drafting).
neutral language like “any person” or “any demonstration.”\textsuperscript{145} Content-neutrality is the first requirement in surviving a constitutional challenge, and it seems as if most states have taken that first step correctly so as not to cause a drafting weakness.\textsuperscript{146}

2. Bans Must Be Reasonable Time, Place, and Manner Restrictions

Crafting a content-neutral funeral protest ban that is a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction is the best way to survive constitutional scrutiny.\textsuperscript{147} A reasonable time, place, and manner restriction must be content-neutral, advance a substantial government interest, be narrowly tailored, and leave open alternative channels of communication.\textsuperscript{148} A reasonable time, place, and manner status is important, as courts overwhelmingly uphold such restrictions.\textsuperscript{149}

State funeral protest bans can still be challenged under reasonable time, place, and manner restriction analysis.\textsuperscript{150} For example, a statute that is not narrowly tailored may fail this analysis.\textsuperscript{151} States like South Dakota, with extreme distance requirements like 1,000 feet, or Kentucky, which arguably regulates too much conduct, such as distributing literature, may fail a narrowly tailored analysis because of these drafting weaknesses.\textsuperscript{152} In addition, if a protest ban is not effective (either because privacy rights are compromised or more speech than necessary is restricted), it can be argued that its means do not meet its goals and,

\textsuperscript{145} See supra Part II.B (listing relevant state legislation).
\textsuperscript{146} See supra Part II.B (noting that Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Nebraska, Maryland, Missouri and Ohio are examples of states using content-neutral language like “no person,” “no demonstration,” and “no protest’’); Wis. S. 525 (“No person . . . .”); Ohio H.R. 484 (“[N]o person shall picket or engage in protest activities . . . .”). However, some statutes focus more on the intent to disrupt. See, e.g., N.J. A2870 and N.C. S. 1833 (allowing an argument that non-disruptive supportive demonstrations would be excluded from the bans). See Chen, supra note 29, at 46-47 (“If lawmakers wish to regulate a particular type of constitutionally protected speech or speech-related conduct, they cannot openly identify the object of their concern in the statute’s language.”).

\textsuperscript{147} See supra notes 64-65 and accompanying text; see also supra Part II.C; supra note 83.

\textsuperscript{148} See supra note 83 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{149} See generally supra Part II.C (discussing First Amendment analysis about content-neutrality). But see Collins, supra note 134 (holding that reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions cannot be used because these restrictions discriminate on the content of the message, and there is viewpoint-discrimination if the stated or actual purpose of the laws is to prohibit groups like Westboro Baptist Church but not others like the Patriot Guard Riders).

\textsuperscript{150} See supra Parts II.D-III.B (looking at how courts have judged reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions in other contexts).

\textsuperscript{151} See supra notes 84-86 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{152} See supra notes 47, 50 (highlighting South Dakota and Kentucky statutes).
therefore, that it does not constitute a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction.\textsuperscript{153} It will be important to courts in the future whether or not a ban has been successful at eliminating the harm caused by WBC’s funeral protests or, rather, if the ban inhibited WBC’s speech with no benefits coming from the regulation.\textsuperscript{154} Finally, if a protest ban does not leave open alternative channels of communication, it cannot be considered a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction.\textsuperscript{155} Therefore, the statutes that encompass more activities under their definitions of protest or picketing are more at risk, since they allow fewer alternatives and may even run the risk of being considered overbroad.\textsuperscript{156} All of these examples highlight the importance of careful drafting that is required to create a constitutional funeral protest ban.\textsuperscript{157}

3. Bans Cannot Be Overbroad or Vague

A speech regulation that is overbroad or vague can be challenged on its face; if such a challenge is successful, the entire law is invalid.\textsuperscript{158} Thus, a state funeral protest ban must be narrow in scope and must contain clear definitions and language so as not to be ruled unconstitutionally vague.\textsuperscript{159} Unfortunately, balancing overbreadth and content-neutrality when drafting legislation is very difficult.\textsuperscript{160}

Since most of the protest bans prohibit any kind of speech or demonstration at funerals, even positive forms of each, it can be argued that the laws are too broad to survive constitutional scrutiny.\textsuperscript{161} For example, demonstrations by the Patriot Guard Riders are not disruptive and do not cause harm to grieving families, but they are still prohibited

\textsuperscript{153} See supra notes 84-86 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{154} Associated Press 16779, supra note 32 (noting that a member of WBC told the Des Moines Register that they would still come to Iowa, despite the law, but would honor the distance requirements).
\textsuperscript{155} See supra notes 85-86 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{156} See Ky. H.R. 333, supra note 50; see also infra notes 160-69; infra Part III.A.3 (discussing overbreadth and vagueness weaknesses).
\textsuperscript{157} See infra Part IV (proposing a model statute based on drafting strengths and weaknesses discussed).
\textsuperscript{158} See supra Part II.C (laying the foundation for a First Amendment analysis).
\textsuperscript{159} See supra Part III.A.3 (discussing vagueness weaknesses in drafting).
\textsuperscript{160} Chen, supra note 29, at 65.
\textsuperscript{161} Associated Press 16064, supra note 35 (explaining why Ronald K.L. Collins, a First Amendment Center scholar in Virginia, believes it will be hard to apply a law in a content-neutral way without restricting those who want to show respect for the dead); Collins, supra note 3 (stating that now you cannot be angry at or protest any dead person, even people like Lee Harvey Oswald or John Wilkes Booth). This author suggests that perhaps the decedents’ families be allowed to invite whomever they want.
by the statutes. This example illustrates the problem of crafting a protest ban that makes clear what types of protests are unlawful and the side effects of prohibiting typically welcomed speech due to its breadth. However, to attain content-neutrality, a level of broadness is necessary. The statute’s constitutionality will ultimately depend on how a court draws that line between content-neutrality and over-breadth.

Several state funeral protest bans have shown constitutional weakness in the context of vagueness or over-breadth problems. For example, Kansas’ original statute was deemed unconstitutionally vague because of its time restrictions “before or after,” but recently the Kansas legislature changed its statute to specify a time period from one hour before to two hours after. Similarly, Missouri passed a second funeral protest ban that changed the language “in front of or about” to 300 feet, in fear of having its statute declared unconstitutionally vague. Kentucky’s vague time restriction prohibiting protests “at any time of the day” and its far-reaching definition of protest activity may cause vagueness and over-breadth problems in any upcoming lawsuits. Finally, South Dakota’s 1,000 foot distance restriction is in danger of being held unconstitutionally overbroad, because it encompasses such a large area and may regulate more speech than the Constitution allows. States with clear time restrictions will likely avoid this vagueness problem.

In contrast, Florida’s ban is brief and vague, including language such as “interrupts.” Florida is unique in that most of the other statutes

---

162 See supra note 28 and accompanying text (discussing Patriot Guard Riders). See generally notes 34-55 and accompanying text (revealing how various states’ laws prohibit both friends and foes).

163 Collins, supra note 134 (statutes need to make clear what types of messages are considered unlawful protest).

164 See supra Part III.B.3 (explaining how content-neutral regulations can be broad and vague).

165 Kan. S. 421; MO. REV. STAT. § 578.501; see also supra notes 110-11.

166 Kan. S. 421.

167 See supra notes 66-68 and 72.

168 See supra notes 69-70 and accompanying text.

169 McDonough, supra note 24, at 16 (commenting on how UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh believes that principles underlying bans on picketing private residences could be applied to funerals, but excessive distance requirements, which he believes regulate more than 100 feet, would probably be unconstitutional); S.D. S. 156.

170 See supra notes 34-55 (providing examples of various state time restrictions).

171 Fla. H.R. 7127, supra note 46 and accompanying text (showing the bill’s vague distance language).
have clearly defined terms and distance and time requirements.\textsuperscript{172} For example, Texas’ statute successfully avoids vagueness by clearly defining every term.\textsuperscript{173} A model statute should define every term succinctly and avoid vague language like that in Florida’s statute.\textsuperscript{174}

Definitions are easy targets for findings of vague or overbroad language because funeral protest bans differ in their definitions and often have unique clauses.\textsuperscript{175} For instance, various definitions of the word “funeral” exist.\textsuperscript{176} Kansas defines a “funeral” as any “ceremony, procession or memorial service in connection with the death of a person.”\textsuperscript{177} Indiana restricts protests for a funeral, procession, burial, or viewing.\textsuperscript{178} Illinois includes any facility used for funeral services.\textsuperscript{179} Missouri extends the restriction to any place in which a funeral is held.\textsuperscript{180}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{172} See supra Part II.B (providing a sampling of current state legislation).
\textsuperscript{173} H.R. 97, 2006 Leg. (Tex. 2006), http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/793/billtext/pdf/HB00097F.pdf. The definitions include:
\begin{itemize}
\item[(1)] “Facility” means a building at which any portion of a funeral service takes place, including a funeral parlor, mortuary, private home, or established place of worship.
\item[(2)] “Funeral service” means a ceremony, procession, or memorial service, including a wake or viewing, held in connection with the burial or cremation of the dead.
\item[(3)] “Picketing” means:
\begin{itemize}
\item[(A)] standing, sitting, or repeated walking, riding, driving, or other similar action by a person displaying or carrying a banner, placard, or sign;
\item[(B)] engaging in loud singing, chanting, whistling, or yelling, with or without noise amplification through a device such as a bullhorn or microphone; or
\item[(C)] blocking access to a facility or cemetery being used for a funeral service.
\end{itemize}
\end{itemize}
\textsuperscript{174} (b) A person commits an offense if, during the period beginning one hour before the service begins and ending one hour after the service is completed, the person engages in picketing within 500 feet of a facility or cemetery being used for a funeral service.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{175} See supra notes 34-72, 160-68 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{176} See supra notes 34-72, 160-68 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{177} Kan. S. 421.
\textsuperscript{178} See IND. CODE § 35-45-1-3.
\textsuperscript{179} See Ill. Pub. Act 094-0772; see also Wis. S. 525 (defining funeral or memorial service as a wake or burial, but excluding services that are “not intended to honor or commemorate one or more specific decedents”).
\textsuperscript{180} See MO. REV. STAT. § 578.501 (defining funeral as the “ceremonies, processions and memorial services held in connection with the burial or cremation of the dead”).
“Protest” or “picketing” are also defined differently by the states. For example, Kansas defines picketing as “protest activities engaged in by a person or persons stationed before or about a cemetery, mortuary, church, or other location where a funeral is held or conducted.” Ohio defines protest activities as “any action that is disruptive or undertaken to disrupt or disturb a funeral or burial service or a funeral procession.” Kentucky restricted even more activities, such as singing, distributing literature, and interfering with access to a funeral. As these examples illustrate, some statutes are more detailed than others, have stricter restrictions than others, and ultimately may present more constitutional concerns than others. A model statute needs to clearly define its terms and avoid vague or overbroad language when providing definitions.

4. Public vs. Private Forums

Sidewalks and streets have traditionally been held to be public forums. Although most funerals take place on private property, protestors who have used public sidewalks and streets to voice their messages are now being regulated in those public places. In effect, state funeral protest bans have regulated speech on public property. This raises a constitutional concern, since:

Wherever the title of streets and parks may rest, they have immemorially been held in trust for the use of the public and, time out of mind, have been used for purposes of assembly, communicating thoughts between citizens, and discussing public questions. Such use of the streets and public places has, from ancient times, been a part of the privileges, immunities, rights, and liberties of citizens.

---

181 See supra notes 165, 167-68 and accompanying text.
182 Kan. S. 421.
183 Ohio H.R. 484.
184 Ky. H.R. 333.
185 Compare Fla. H.R. 7127, with other statutes in Part II.B, supra.
186 Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703, 715 (2000). Said the Court, “[T]he public sidewalks, streets, and ways affected by the statute are ‘quintessential’ public forums for free speech.” Id.
187 See generally supra Part IIA; Hudson, supra note 3 (arguing that sidewalks and streets around funeral homes and churches are public and restricting speech on public space must have a compelling interest that is lacking here).
188 See generally supra Part II.B (sampling current state legislation).
Even so, government can still regulate speech in public forums, provided the regulation is content-neutral and a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction. Furthermore, recent case precedent suggests that most government-owned properties will be considered non-public forums. Government can regulate or even prohibit all speech in non-public forums as long as the regulation is viewpoint neutral and reasonable. Therefore, it is possible to regulate speech activities in any of the areas that the funeral bans encompass, whether or not they are characterized as public forums or non-public forums, so long as the bans are carefully and constitutionally crafted.

As previously mentioned, a ban must be content-neutral, be a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction, and not be vague or overbroad. A state funeral protest ban that meets all of these requirements has the best chance of surviving First Amendment challenges. In order to illustrate the importance of these requirements in drafting, the Note will next analyze similar speech restrictions in other protest contexts.

B. How Do These Funeral Protest Bans Compare To Similar Protest Restrictions in Other Contexts?

Constitutional challenges to funeral protest bans are in their earliest stages; thus, comparing these bans to similar protest restrictions in other contexts will be helpful to this analysis and to predicting constitutionality. As previously mentioned, several abortion,
residential picketing, and church-related cases dealing with time, place, and manner restrictions on speech in public forums shed light on what a court looks for, what restrictions it has declared unconstitutional, and why. Unfortunately, determining whether a regulation is reasonable is very contextual. Therefore, looking at the results and reasoning of similar cases may help in crafting a constitutional funeral protest ban.

In *Hill v. Colorado*, the Supreme Court upheld a statute regulating speech within one hundred feet of an abortion clinic, as well as an eight-foot buffer zone surrounding individuals entering and leaving the clinic as a valid time, place, and manner restriction. In its reasoning, the Court found the regulation to be content-neutral and stressed that the statute placed no limitations on the number of speakers, the noise level, or the number, size, or text of images on the placards used by the protestors. In addition, the Court acknowledged that the statute required protestors to approach someone knowingly in order for a violation to be upheld. However, it can be argued that funeral protest laws are different from the sort of buffer zones created in *Hill* because the former do not involve a right to access to health services and there is no constitutional right to have a public funeral without protests. Additionally, the distance requirements were much lower in *Hill* than in many state funeral protest bans. Despite that argument, *Hill* provides an excellent roadmap for drafting a constitutional time, place, and manner speech restriction.


198 *See supra* Part II.D (discussing similar protest restrictions in other contexts).
199 *Chemerinsky, supra* note 81, at 1357 (“Looked at together, all of these cases indicate that the determination of whether a regulation is a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction is entirely contextual.”).
200 *See supra* Part IV (laying out a model statute).
202 *Hill*, 530 U.S. at 726-27. The Court acknowledged that the statute applied to “all” forms of protesting, counseling, and demonstrators whether or not they concerned abortion or supported a certain stance. *Id.* at 726.
203 *Id.* at 720.
204 *Id.*
205 Collins, *supra* note 3. However, shorter distances also pose problems because privacy is an important countervailing liberty interest to First Amendment freedoms. *Id.*
206 *See supra* Part IV (setting forth a model statute based in part on the reasoning in *Hill*).
Other reasoning used in the cases previously examined may also be distinguished. For instance, laws banning residential picketing are arguably not applicable because the home is not involved in funeral protest bans. Based on that sort of reasoning, it will be difficult to use Frisby’s “captive audience” approach for support in defending a funeral ban court challenge. In addition, it may be hard to apply the secondary effects doctrine to state funeral protest bans as the Eighth Circuit court did with the Olmer ordinance.

The remaining cases previously discussed also shed light on how to craft a model statute. Madsen and Schenck both serve as examples that buffer zones will likely be upheld if they are a reasonable distance, such as less than one hundred feet, and they are not floating. These cases shed light on the issue by allowing us to see how the Court has analyzed such content-neutral time, place, and manner restrictions against protestors.

Finally, St. David’s and Olmer prove to be valuable examples concerning churches and protestors. In St. David’s, a court upheld a buffer zone against protestors around the church for thirty minutes before and after services because the court recognized that citizens have an interest in practicing their faith without interruptions. In Olmer, on the other hand, the court struck down a very similar ordinance because it prohibited more speech than was necessary in achieving its goal of protecting children. Both of these examples show that a model statute needs to make sure to convey the state’s interests clearly and be narrowly tailored and crafted so as not to prohibit more speech than

207 See supra Part II.D (noting similar restrictions in other protest contexts).
208 Collins, supra note 3 (stating also that even absolute bans involving the home are sometimes not upheld).
209 See supra notes 81-83, 161 and accompanying text; cf. Phelps, supra note 3, at 300-01 (describing how it may be possible to apply the Frisby “captive audience” test to churches, because another court could find enough similarities, including that both are services taking place at specific times and days requiring people to be there); Frisby v. Schultz, 487 U.S. 474 (1988); supra notes 102-05 and accompanying text.
210 Olmer v. City of Lincoln, 192 F.3d 1176 (8th Cir. 1999); supra notes 109-10 and accompanying text; supra Part II.D; see also Phelps, supra note 3, at 307.
211 See supra Part II.D (providing an overview of speech restrictive bans in other protest contexts).
213 See infra Part IV (using this analysis in creating a model statute).
214 See supra notes 107-10 and accompanying text.
215 See supra notes 107-08 and accompanying text.
216 See supra notes 109-10 and accompanying text.
necessary when regulating funeral protests. The foregoing analysis of restrictions in other contexts sheds light on how to best craft a constitutional funeral protest ban.

IV. CONTRIBUTION

Despite the importance of First Amendment political speech rights, state bans have been favoring the privacy rights of the deceased and their families in the context of funeral settings. As these funeral bans continue to differ and are eventually challenged in court, the sensitivity attached to First Amendment speech rights will require a careful crafting of such restrictions and bans if they are to stand up to constitutional challenges. This Part will address whether striking a certain balance of rights or certain phrasing in a model statute can make legislation more likely to withstand future court challenges. In order to test constitutional challenges, a model statute based off of comparing current legislation

---

217 See infra Part IV (providing a model statute).
218 See supra Parts II.B, III.D; see also Carrie L. Johnson, Comment, Unwanted Speech and the State’s Interest in Protecting Religious Free Exercise: Drawing First Amendment Lines in Olmer v. City of Lincoln, 34 CREIGHTON L. REV. 423, 471 (2001). Johnson states:

To follow Hill, the Lincoln City Council would draft its ordinance to make it unlawful for one individual to approach within eight feet of another individual without their consent for purposes of oral protest, education, counseling, or leaflet passing when within one hundred feet of a building used for religious purposes. To make the ordinance more narrowly tailored to its interest, the Lincoln City Council could follow its previous model and ban such activities only during “scheduled religious activities.”

219 See supra Part II.B (discussing current state funeral protest bans); see also Phelps, supra note 3, at 310-12 (1999) (arguing that to construct a valid ban on church picketing, the best interests are protecting children, as in Olmer, or protecting religious privacy, as long as it does not violate the Establishment Clause, that ample alternative communication channels should not be a problem; that narrow tailoring is the hardest requirement to meet, and that, as said by the dissent in Frisby, coercive aspects of picketing bans should be eliminated, including regulations on group numbers, noise levels, and hours as opposed to the government being inactive or overbroad).

220 Hudson II, supra note 125 (citing McCoy, who believes that reasonable time, place and manner restrictions to protect privacy rights, if applied neutrally, would likely survive constitutional challenges and who also stated, “[t]he true test of free speech is whether we tolerate political ideas which we all consider offensive. I mean, the ideas which we agree on do not need protection.”).
and protesting precedents from other contexts needs to be addressed and laid out. The model statute consists of compiling strongly drafted sections of current state legislation (those sections that are likely to survive a court challenge), and then further enhances those sections to create a constitutional funeral protest ban.

A. Components of a Model Statute

A model funeral protest ban must be content-neutral, a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction, neither vague nor overbroad in its terms or what activity it encompasses, limited to public places, leave open alternative channels of communication, and draw upon the rulings of the courts in the abortion, residential picketing, and prior church-related rulings. The model statute cannot target the WBC or any other similar group on its face. If it did specifically enumerate groups, the statute would be subject to heightened scrutiny and would likely fail strict scrutiny. Similarly, if not equally enforced among all those who disturb a funeral, whether it is the WBC or Patriot Guard Riders, challengers may argue that the legislative purpose is in fact discriminatory. To be a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction, the model statute must not only be content-neutral but also have clear time and distance restrictions. The more extreme time and distance restrictions are, the less constitutional they will be.\(^{221}\)

Finally, if terms are unclear or the statute is crafted too broadly, it will likely fail a court challenge. A model statute should keep its distance requirements to 300 feet or less, its time restrictions as closely related to the time of the service as possible, and clearly provide timeframes quantitatively, while prohibiting only as much speech as necessary to preserve the privacy and sanctity of the service. As the Kentucky and Missouri statutes face court challenges already, it is clear that using language describing the time restrictions as “any time” instead of setting a concrete amount or having backup legislation in anticipation of a constitutional violation will place a target on a state’s funeral protest ban.\(^{222}\)

---

\(^{221}\) See S.D. S. 156, at § 3 (describing South Dakota’s 1,000 foot restriction); Fla. H.R. 7127 (providing only vague language about distance); Collins, supra note 3 (arguing that a greater distance lessens the effectiveness of protests).

\(^{222}\) See Ky. H.R. 333.
B. Model Statute

The Model Statute will borrow from only the most strongly drafted sections of legislation previously discussed and will further amend and enhance them. To start, the Model Statute would benefit from a very clear and concise purpose statement, much like the one in Oklahoma’s statute. Next, the conduct prohibited at funerals needs to be clearly defined and given a time restriction. Kentucky’s statute does a thorough job of this and is the best model. Also, clear distance and time restrictions need to be set. Illinois sets a distance requirement of 200 feet and is overtly clear about which and from where services are protected within this buffer zone, making its statute an appropriate model. Finally, penalties for violating such a statute need to be given. The proposed Model Statute is as follows:

(a) It is generally recognized that families have a substantial interest in organizing and attending funerals, which also includes wakes, memorial services, or burials for deceased relatives.

(b) A person is guilty of interference with a funeral, which also includes a wake, memorial service, or burial when he or she, at any time on any day, from one hour prior to, during, and one hour after:

(1) Blocks, impedes, inhibits, or in any other manner obstructs or interferes with access into or from any building or parking lot of a building in which a funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial is being conducted, or any burial plot or the parking lot of the cemetery in which a funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial is being conducted;
(2) Congregates, pickets, patrols, demonstrates, or enters on that portion of a public right-of-way or private property; or
(3) Without authorization from the family of the deceased or person conducting the service, during a funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial.

223 The proposed statute is composed of sections from various state funeral protest bans and this compilation is the contribution of the author.

224 Okla. S. 1020. The proposed additions to the section are italicized and are the contribution of the author.
burial: Sings, chants, whistles, shouts, yells, or uses a bullhorn, auto horn, sound amplification equipment, or other sounds or images observable to or within earshot of participants in the funeral, wake, memorial service, or burial.225

c) Such conduct is prohibited within 200 feet of any ingress or egress of that funeral, which also includes a wake, memorial service, or burial site. For purposes of this Section:

(1) “Funeral” means the ceremonies, rituals, processions, and memorial services held at a funeral site in connection with the burial, cremation, or memorial of a deceased person.
(2) “Funeral site” means a church, synagogue, mosque, funeral home, mortuary, cemetery, gravesite, mausoleum, or other place at which a funeral is conducted or is scheduled to be conducted within the next 60 minutes or has been conducted within the last 60 minutes.226

(d) “A person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 90 days or a fine not exceeding $1,000 or both. In addition, subsequent violations may lead to more severe fines not exceeding $5,000 or imprisonment not exceeding 120 days.227

C. Commentary on the Proposed Model Statute

The proposed Model Statute incorporates parts from various, already ratified funeral protest bans. In each section, the drafting was enhanced to cover different types of services connected with death, as well as to include specific timeframes everywhere in the statute. The compilation utilized aspects from various statutes with strong drafting likely to withstand a First Amendment challenge. Most statutes are already similar to this model and seem likely to be upheld. The key

225 See Ky. H.R. 333. The proposed amendments and additions are italicized or stricken with a line and are the contribution of the author.
226 See Ill. Pub. Act 094-0772. The proposed amendments and additions are italicized and are the contribution of the author.
227 See Md. H.R. 850. The proposed additions to the section are italicized and are the contribution of the author.
components and constitutional weaknesses of most laws of this type, however, lie in extreme distance and time restrictions, vague language, and content-based language. If a funeral protest ban can pass those elements, it is likely to remain on the books. If funeral protest bans follow this pattern, courts will likely find them to be a constitutional way to protect the privacy of grieving families.

V. CONCLUSION

The WBC and its controversial funeral protests have sparked a complex constitutional dispute nation-wide. Protecting speech is crucial, as is providing grieving families with privacy and honoring the dead, especially those that have died while serving our country. Regardless of a person’s stance on homosexuality, war, funerals, or the appropriate reach of the First Amendment, the recently proposed and passed state funeral protest bans will continue to be passed in states and eventually challenged in court. The proposed model statute seeks to strike the appropriate balance of rights and highlight drafting techniques to benefit states that have yet to propose such a bill as well as legislatures that may be forced to redraft their current statutes in the near future.

Although most state protest bans will likely withstand constitutional scrutiny, a funeral protest ban will be most successful if it is content-neutral, a reasonable time, place, and manner restriction, contains clearly defined terms, is not vague or overbroad, sets reasonable distance and time requirements and punishments, and is equally enforced among all groups. All of these components are necessary, as previous constitutional analysis and similar restrictions in other contexts discussed herein illustrate. Despite other options, such as using the tort system, with the right clarity, reasonableness, and drafting, funeral protest bans can be crafted constitutionally and provide the best answer to any conflict of constitutional rights. Furthermore, strong public support for their passage thus far makes it even more likely that, despite future court challenges and possible redrafting, legislatures will work hard to keep these statutes on the books.

This issue presents a patriotic paradox: WBC spreading its message through its right to protest, legislatures following the will of the public and passing statutes with constitutional concerns, and, finally, soldiers who died protecting the freedoms of this country, among them the First Amendment. Although the Free Speech clause can be viewed as promoting tolerance and necessary to the exchange of ideas, it raises emotional responses when put into a funeral context that may
overshadow free speech rights if not drafted carefully. We must remember the warning from *Texas v. Johnson*:

> The way to preserve the flag’s special role is not to punish those who feel differently about these matters. It is to persuade them that they are wrong.

... We can imagine no more appropriate response to burning a flag than waving one’s own, no better way to counter a flag burner’s message than by saluting the flag that burns. ... We do not consecrate the flag by punishing its desecration, for in doing so we dilute the freedom that this cherished emblem represents.228

For those who are grieving a loved one at a funeral and are disrupted by the WBC and its protests, placards, and lyrics that began this Note, it will no doubt be difficult to remember the First Amendment, respect the speech rights of the protestors, favor the ideals that your loved one died for over privacy at his or her funeral, and understand the constitutional concerns that surround the situation. State funeral protest bans, if drafted carefully, can successfully balance the competing rights in this patriotic paradox.

*Kara Beil*229

---

229 Kara Beil graduated magna cum laude from DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, 2005. She is a JD candidate in May 2008, from Valparaiso University School of Law in Valparaiso, Indiana. “I would like to thank Professor Rosalie Levinson for acting not only as a great advisor for my Note, but for continuing to serve as one of the best professors of law at Valparaiso University. Most importantly, I would like to thank my family, friends, and fiancé for their continued support in my education and for providing much happiness and inspiration in my life.”