



## PRESS RELEASE

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### HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACHES TO COURT: IF WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNEEL TO PROTEST INJUSTICE, COACH KENNEDY HAS THE RIGHT TO KNEEL IN PRAYER

*NFL players and high school football coaches file briefs in support of Coach Kennedy at the Ninth Circuit*

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**Tacoma, Wash.** – Two high-profile amicus briefs were filed with the U.S. Court of Appeals on Monday evening on behalf of Coach Joe Kennedy, a high school football coach who was fired for taking a knee at the fifty-yard line and offering a brief, private prayer after high school football games.

One of the briefs is on behalf of two football coaches at Garfield High School in Seattle. Coaches Kellen Alley and Joseph Thomas gained national media attention when they joined their team in kneeling during the national anthem to protest racial injustice. In their brief, the coaches ask the court to affirm that the First Amendment protects the rights of public employees—including football coaches—to private expression. [Read the brief](#)

“If the Constitution protects the right of a football coach to kneel to protest injustice, it certainly protects the right of a football coach to kneel in prayer,” Mike Berry, Senior Counsel at First Liberty Institute, the law firm defending Coach Kennedy, says.

The second brief is by two NFL players: Steve Largent, a retired Seattle Seahawk and member of the NFL Hall of Fame, and Chad Hennings, a retired Dallas Cowboy and three-time Super Bowl champion. In the brief, the former NFL stars recall how football coaches were a positive influence on their lives. They contend that Bremerton ISD’s actions unnecessarily restrict free speech and impair coaches’ ability to serve as role models and mentors to their students. They ask the court to rule in Coach Kennedy’s favor so he can resume coaching his players. [Read the brief](#)

“Whether you are liberal or conservative, whether you are a person of devout faith or no faith at all, we should all seek to defend the right to free speech,” Berry says. “It’s central to our American identity as a diverse, pluralistic society, where we foster the free exchange of ideas.”

Kennedy filed a lawsuit against Bremerton School District (BSD) after the school district terminated him for offering a brief, private, and quiet prayer at the fifty-yard line after high school football games. In the lawsuit, Coach Kennedy’s attorneys claimed BSD violated Kennedy’s First Amendment rights.

Coach Kennedy is represented by the national non-profit law firm First Liberty Institute, as well as Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, Oldfield & Helsdon, PLLC, and attorney Anthony J. Ferate.

Read more and view legal documents at [CoachKennedyFacts.com](http://CoachKennedyFacts.com)

**About First Liberty Institute**

[First Liberty Institute](#) is the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

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