



Federal Judge Rules Against Beloved Washington High School Football Coach Fired for Post-Game Prayers on Field

Case returned to District Court after U.S. Supreme Court denied review, sought more details

Tacoma, WA—Yesterday, federal district court judge Ronald Leighton granted the Bremerton (WA) School District’s motion for summary judgement in the case of Coach Joe Kennedy. Bremerton School District fired the longtime football coach because he took a knee in brief, silent prayer after football games. Kennedy’s case attracted nationwide attention from the media, Hall of Fame coaches and players, and even President Trump. In January, President Trump invited Coach Kennedy to the Oval Office as he announced new actions to protect religious freedom in America’s public schools.

Coach Kennedy and his legal team plan to appeal yesterday’s decision.

“We are disappointed in this decision, but we are undeterred in our mission to obtain justice for Coach Kennedy,” said Mike Berry, General Counsel for First Liberty Institute. “For almost five long years Joe has had to miss coaching the game he loves. Joe has fought—first as a U.S. Marine, then as a coach—to prove that every American has the right to engage in individual religious expression, including praying in public, without fear of getting fired. He knows this fight isn’t over.”

Last January, the Supreme Court of the United States declined to reverse a previous decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit upholding Kennedy’s 2015 firing. However, in a separate statement filed by Justice Alito and joined by Justices Thomas, Gorsuch, and Kavanaugh, the justices explained that the Court needed more information in order to resolve the matter. As the four justices wrote, “the Ninth Circuit’s understanding of the free speech rights of public school teachers is troubling and may justify review in the future.” The case then returned to the district court for further review, prompting yesterday’s decision.

Coach Kennedy's case received national attention and support from political and religious leaders including President Trump and Franklin Graham, hall of fame football coach Bobby Bowden, and former NFL players Steve Largent, and Chad Hennings.

To learn more about the case, visit CoachKennedyFacts.com.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](http://FirstLibertyInstitute.org) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

To arrange an interview, contact Lacey McNeil at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.