

BREAKING: Ninth Circuit Again Denies Right of Beloved Football Coach to say a Brief, Private Prayer After Games

Attorneys asked court to reinstate football coach who was fired after praying silently and alone for 15-30 seconds after football games

San Francisco, CA—Today, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit held that the Bremerton School District in Washington state can ban Coach Joe Kennedy from taking a knee in brief, personal prayer after football games. Attorneys representing Kennedy, First Liberty Institute, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Jeff Helsdon, and A.J. Ferate collectively, plan to appeal today’s decision.

“Banning coaches from praying just because they can be seen is wrong and contradicts the Constitution,” said Mike Berry, First Liberty Institute’s General Counsel. “Today’s opinion threatens the rights of millions of Americans who simply want to be able to freely exercise their faith without fear of losing their job. We plan to appeal, and we hope the Supreme Court will right this wrong. This fight is far from over.”

In January 2019, the Supreme Court of the United States declined to review the case at that time and instead allowed Coach Kennedy’s case to continue through the court system. But in a separate statement written 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 Justice Alito 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 where, in January 2020, U.S. District Court Judge Ronald Leighton granted the Bremerton (WA) School District’s motion for summary judgment. Kennedy’s attorneys then appealed to the Ninth Circuit, which heard oral argument in January.

Coach Kennedy’s case continues to receive attention and support from across the nation, including Franklin Graham, College Football Hall of Fame coach Bobby Bowden, NFL Hall of Famer Steve Largent, and Super Bowl winner Chad Hennings.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](https://www.firstliberty.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.