



*(Coach Kennedy at the Bremerton High School football field.  
Photo credit: First Liberty Institute. May be republished.)*

## **Coach Has A Prayer: U.S. Supreme Court to Review Ninth Circuit Decision Preventing Coach from Taking a Knee at Midfield**

*First Liberty Institute attorneys asking Court to reverse decision allowing school district to fire coach because of his silent prayer*

---

**Washington, DC**—Today, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it will hear oral arguments in the case *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, in which attorneys for First Liberty Institute and Kirkland & Ellis LLP, led by veteran Supreme Court advocate Paul Clement, represent Joe Kennedy. Kennedy, a former high school football coach, is asking the Supreme Court to reverse a lower court [decision](#) that allowed a school district to fire him because fans and students could see him take a knee in silent prayer after football games.

“No teacher or coach should lose their job for simply expressing their faith while in public,” said Kelly Shackelford, President and CEO of First Liberty. “By taking this important case, the Supreme Court can protect the right of every American to engage in private religious expression, including praying in public, without fear of punishment.”

Paul Clement, former U.S. Solicitor General, partner at Kirkland & Ellis LLP and First Liberty volunteer attorney, said, “We look forward to presenting the Coach’s case, which goes to the heart of the First Amendment, to the Justices.”

Coach Kennedy added, “Six years away from the football field has been far too long. I am extremely grateful that the Supreme Court is going to hear my case and pray that I will soon be able to be back on the field coaching the game and players I love.”

The Supreme Court declined to review the case in January 2019, but allowed the lower courts to continue to develop the factual record. At that time, four justices (Justice Alito joined by Justices Thomas, Gorsuch, and Kavanaugh) attached a statement signaling that the Court would be open

to hearing the case at a future time, saying in part, “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 returned to the lower courts, where a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit sided with the school district.

Mike Pence, former Vice President of the United States, and Tommy Bowden—son of legendary football coach Bobby Bowden—NFL Hall of Famer, Steve Largent, and three-time Super Bowl winner, Chad Hennings, among many others filed “friend-of-the-court” briefs urging the Supreme Court to take the case.

###

### **About First Liberty Institute**

[First Liberty Institute](#) 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 McNiel at [media@firstliberty.org](mailto:media@firstliberty.org) or by calling 972-941-4453.