



*(Coach Kennedy on the Bremerton High School football field.
Photo credit: First Liberty Institute. May be republished.
Access full resolution photos at CoachKennedyFacts.com under "Photos and Videos")*

NINTH CIRCUIT TO HEAR ARGUMENTS OVER COACH KENNEDY'S POST-GAME, SILENT PRAYERS

*Appeals court will review whether beloved football coach has constitutional right
to silent religious expression*

More info: CoachKennedyFacts.com

SEATTLE, WA—On Monday, June 12, at 9:00 a.m. (PST) attorneys with First Liberty Institute will present arguments to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit over whether Bremerton School District (“BSD”) may continue its religious discrimination against former Bremerton High School (“BHS”) coach Joe Kennedy’s brief, silent religious expression.

Background: Coach Joe Kennedy was the head coach of the BHS junior varsity football team and an assistant coach for the varsity team. Beginning with his first football game as a coach, in 2008, Kennedy waited until the game had ended and the players had cleared the field. He then walked on the field, took a knee, and silently thanked God for his players and the opportunity to coach them. He continued this brief, silent religious expression for over seven years without complaint by students, coaches, or parents.

In October 2015, [BSD instructed](#) him to cease the religious practice, denied Coach Kennedy’s request for a religious accommodation, and ordered him to not only stop praying, but to refrain from any “demonstrative religious activity, readily observable to . . . students and the attending public.”

In 2016, Kennedy filed a [lawsuit](#) against BSD after the school district terminated him for offering a brief, quiet prayer on the field after high school football games. In the lawsuit, Coach Kennedy's attorneys claimed BSD violated Kennedy's First Amendment rights. Kennedy's legal team sought to have him reinstated as a coach, but a federal district court judge ruled against him. On October 3, 2016, Coach Kennedy [appealed](#) the district court judge's ruling to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Coach Kennedy does not seek money damages, but simply hopes to return to the sidelines to coach his players.

MEDIA ADVISORY

- WHAT:** Oral arguments in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, Appeal No. 16-35801.
- WHO:** **Mike Berry**, Deputy General Counsel of First Liberty Institute, and **Hiram Sasser**, Deputy Chief Counsel of First Liberty Institute, will be available for comment immediately following oral arguments. (*On site contact: Mike Berry*).
- WHEN:** Monday, June 12, 2017, immediately following oral arguments.
- WHERE:** United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, William K. Nakamura Courthouse, 1010 Fifth Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104.

Quote from Mike Berry, Deputy General Counsel of First Liberty Institute:

"We are committed to protecting Coach Kennedy's right to religious freedom. If the Constitution protects the right of a football coach to kneel in protest, it should certainly protect the right of a football coach to kneel in silent prayer. We hope the court will allow a great coach to be reunited with his players at Bremerton High. The First Amendment guarantees Coach Kennedy's right to freely exercise his religion."

Quote from Coach Joe Kennedy:

"I am grateful for the opportunity to have the court review this case. I fought in the Marines for our freedom. I never thought I'd have to go to court to protect my own. My hope is that, at the end of the day, the court will let me get back to the sidelines and back with my team."

About First Liberty Institute

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

To arrange an interview, contact Abigail Doty at adoty@firstliberty.org or by calling 469-440-7598 (office) or 469-237-9102 (cell).

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