

AFA Calls for Supreme Court to Honor Fired Football Coach's Constitutional Rights

Coach Joe Kennedy, a former Washington state high school football coach, was fired in 2015 when his silent post-game prayers were joined by players and caught attention. Now it appears Kennedy's prayers may have been answered as the Supreme Court considers hearing his case, according to a recent CBN article.

CNN reports that "later this fall, the justices will consider whether to take up the long-running case that involves Coach Joe Kennedy of the Bremerton School District in Washington, who alleged his rights were violated when the school district prohibited him from praying at the conclusion of football games."

American Family Association Executive Vice President Ed Vitagliano commented on the case and the possibility that public prayer will be tried in the Supreme Court.

"It is absurd that in a country like America, with the sort of constitutional protections we have in the Bill of Rights, this travesty should ever have happened in the first place," Vitagliano said. "However, we can certainly hope—and pray—that the Supreme Court finally begins to cut away the tangled reasonings of past rulings and set forth a clear affirmation of religious liberty."

Kennedy prayed alone and silently, but his dedication to prayer caught the attention of both players on his team as well as the opposing team. When the 50-yard-line prayer became a regular occurrence, school officials—worried the district could be accused of endorsing religion—demanded the practice cease. When Kennedy continued, he was fired. Kennedy sued,

saying the dismissal violated his First Amendment right to free speech. When 9th Circuit Court and appeals courts ruled for the school, Kennedy asked the U.S. Supreme Court to hear his case.

In 2019, the high court returned the case to the district court, stating more facts were needed. 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." After a years-long battle through lower courts, the future has nearly arrived for Kennedy.

First Liberty Institute General Counsel Hiram Sasser, part of the team representing Kennedy, told Fox News they believe this time the Supreme Court will hear Kennedy's case: "We are very confident, in light of Justice Alito's previous statement regarding this case, that the Court will take this case and side with religious freedom. We anticipate asking the Court to take the case later in the Fall."

"A man should be able to pray in public and not be punished for it," Vitagliano said. "Period. It should not matter if that man is a high school coach, because Christians—and those from all faiths—should not be shamed for practicing their religion in the public square."

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