

Wisconsin Family Action: Files Supreme Court brief in support of coach who prayed at 50-yard line

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MADISON, WI – Today, Wisconsin Family Action (WFA), along with 28 other state family policy councils across the country and the national organization Family Policy Alliance, filed an amicus (friend-of-the-court) brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in support of high-school football Coach Joseph Kennedy who was fired from a public school in Washington State after he prayed briefly at the 50-yard line.

Kennedy began saying a brief prayer following games years ago. Initially he did so alone, but some students asked him what he was doing. When they asked if they could join, he responded, “This is a free country,” and “You can do what you want.” When the school learned what he was doing, it demanded he stop; but he felt responsible to thank God for the games in that way. As a result, he lost his job.

Following his termination, Kennedy appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit where he was subsequently denied. The U.S. Court of Appeals suggested that Coach Kennedy was a bad example to the students when he prayed. Treating such prayers with contempt conflicts with the religion clauses of our constitution, which protect our religious diversity.

At issue before the Supreme Court is whether the First Amendment speech and religious rights protect Kennedy’s brief prayer following games, and whether the Establishment Clause justifies his dismissal.

“We all suffer when our First Amendment freedoms are violated,” said Julaine Appling, WFA president. “A free society should not single out a person’s religious speech for unfavorable treatment.”

The Supreme Court's modern Establishment Clause cases discuss fostering neutrality towards religion. But when all kinds of controversial speech by teachers is permitted and only religious speech is silenced, it sends a message not of religious neutrality but of hostility toward religion. A short prayer following a game, joined in only by those who wish to join, hardly amounts to an establishment of religion, particularly when the school was clear that it had nothing to do with Kennedy's activities.

A copy of Wisconsin Family Action's brief can be found [here](#).