



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Rabbi Bonnie Margulis, Executive Director, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice, 608-513-7121, wifaithvoices4justice@gmail.com

July 23, 2022

Faith Leaders Decry Supreme Court Decision Threatening Separation of Church and State

On Monday, June 27, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in the case *Kennedy V. Bremerton School District*. As leaders of statewide faith-based organizations, we the undersigned decry this decision, which threatens the separation of church and state.

In this case, a high school football coach, Joseph Kennedy, regularly engaged in public prayer before and after school football games with his students. The school district asked him to stop this practice in order to shield the school from liability from a potential lawsuit from parents who might have found this practice coercive. When Kennedy refused to stop, he was suspended. He sued the school district, claiming his First Amendment rights were violated.

The Court decided today in favor of Kennedy, thereby furthering the erosion of the separation of Church and State. In its decision, the Court found that Kennedy's religious and free speech rights took priority over the rights of students not to be coerced into sectarian activities by school officials.

This decision flies in the face of a long string of precedents where the Court has found that students, by virtue of their youth and the fact that they are required to attend school, are particularly vulnerable to coercion and undue influence from school officials and therefore need special protection.

As faith leaders, we celebrate the First Amendment right of free exercise of religion. However, we also recognize the importance of maintaining a strict separation of church and state. It is this separation that has allowed religious minorities to flourish in this country as in no other place on earth. It is this separation that guarantees that no one religious expression is favored over any other by our government, and that no one is ever forced by a government official to engage in religious activity.

As Americans, we look to the US Supreme Court to safeguard our Constitutional rights. In *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, the justices were asked to balance the rights of the coach to practice his faith and the rights of students not to be pressured to engage in religious activity by an authority figure. In this case, the Court got the balance wrong. As religious leaders who value the rich tapestry of multifaith community, honoring many beliefs and respecting those who choose none, we can only hope that subsequent

Courts will restore the balance to where it should be and honor the establishment clause on equal par with the free exercise clause.

Signed,

Jewish Community Relations Council

MICAH

Wisconsin Council of Churches

Wisconsin Council of Rabbis

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

WISDOM