

Christian California Teacher Fired for Refusing to Promote Same-Sex Marriage to Children

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A California teacher is suing her former employer, claiming she was harassed and wrongfully terminated because she refused to read children's books promoting same-sex marriage to children ages one to five years old due to her religious convictions.

Nelli Parisenkova, worked at Bright Horizons Children's Center in Studio City, California as a support teacher for four years before being terminated.

In April 2018, Parisenkova discovered that the childcare room where she worked had books that promoted and celebrated same-sex relationships and marriage.

She asked her direct supervisor for an informal accommodation that would allow her not to read the books or promote any messages that were contrary to her biblically held beliefs. Her request was granted.

According to the lawsuit filed on her behalf by attorneys with the nonprofit national public interest law firm Thomas More Society, Katy Callas, the director of Bright Horizons discovered Parisenkova's religious beliefs last April and reported her to HR for "violating" the company policy that requires all staff to celebrate and promote diversity, including same-sex marriage.

"Callas, who is lesbian, apparently took personal offense at Nelli Parisenkova's religious beliefs and enforced Bright Horizons anti-religious 'diversity and inclusion' workplace

policies,” explained Paul Jonna, Paul Jonna, partner at LiMandri & Jonna LLP and Thomas More Society Special Counsel.

Jonna said Callas called the support teacher into her office and “questioned her in an irate manner.”

“[She] told her that if she did not want to celebrate diversity this was not the place for her to work, gave her an administrative leave memo, escorted her outside with a security guard, and left her out in the 96-degree heat with no transportation,” Jonna explained.

The attorney adds that Parisenkova was forced to walk 20 minutes in the heat and wait 45 minutes for transportation and suffered heat exhaustion for the next two days.

Parisenkova formally requested a religious accommodation from Bright Horizons, but the organization rejected the request and did not consider alternative options such as having another co-worker read the offending books.

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