

Fired Teacher Refuses to Use Preferred Pronouns, Takes Case to Virginia Supreme Court

In the fall of 2018, Peter Vlaming, a high school French teacher, was fired for refusing to use male pronouns when referring to a female student who identified as male.

Vlaming filed a lawsuit against the West Point School Board and was dismissed by a King William County Circuit Court in Virginia, but he appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court. On March 3, Virginia's highest court agreed to hear his case.

The high court is still deliberating the case.

Vlaming now claims he tried to accommodate the student by using her new preferred first name. When he was confronted by the girl about how she heard Vlaming wasn't using her preferred pronouns when referring to her outside of class, Vlaming replied, "Well, let's stop there. Let's get some things straight. First of all, I like you. And I like who you are and the things that make you who you are. I'm glad you're in French class."

Vlaming complimented her on her wit, charm and humor, and said, "We're not supposed to say this, but you're one of my favorite students." The student and her mother felt satisfied with the conversation. In an effort to be transparent, Vlaming says that he talked to his assistant principal about the conversation "the very next day."

When he briefed his assistant principal, he "explained the conversation in detail" and he explained his position: "I respect the student's rights to adopt this new identity. I

respect the right of her family to believe the same. But I can only follow them so far. I cannot in good conscience refer to a girl as a boy.”

The conversation with the assistant principal escalated until the school board told him he had to use male pronouns for the student “no matter who was present, even if it was just another colleague behind closed doors.” The school board officially reprimanded Vlaming and told him that this was the first step toward him getting terminated.

On Halloween in 2021, Vlaming used virtual reality headsets to show his students the underground catacombs in France. During the exercise, the student who identified as a male almost ran into a wall, and Vlaming yelled, “Don’t let her hit the wall!” Within days, the school board asked him to sign an ultimatum to use the student’s preferred pronouns even behind closed doors.

Vlaming said that he could not do so in good conscience, and, after a four-hour hearing, the school board voted 5-0 for Vlaming’s termination.

The day after the decision was made, Vlaming’s students staged a walkout. Wyatt Pedersen, one of his students, said, “The walkout was more than half the school.”

Vlaming has also received official support from Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares, a Republican.

Alliance Defending Freedom’s Senior Counsel Chris Shandavel, who argued the petition for appeal on Vlaming’s behalf, says, “Peter was passionate about the subject he taught, he was well-liked by his students and he did his best to accommodate their needs and requests. But Peter could not in good conscience speak messages that he does not believe to be true.

“We’re pleased the Virginia Supreme Court agreed to hear this important case and are hopeful the court will agree the school

board violated Peter's rights under the Virginia Constitution and state law." {eo}

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