

New Jersey Teacher's Facebook Comments Anger Gay Community

A New Jersey school teacher has landed in a pool of controversy after calling homosexuality a sin on her personal Facebook account.

Viki Knox, who teaches special education at Union High School in Union Township, posted a photo of a display from the school on her Facebook page. The display promotes October as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History Month. The display included photos of Virginia Woolf, Harvey Milk and Neil Patrick Harris. In replying to a friend who asked if the school had really erected the display, she confirmed it had and said, "I'm pitching a fit!"

Knox, an adviser to the school's student prayer group, describes homosexuality as a "perverted spirit" and a sinful lifestyle, saying, "I know sin and it breeds like cancer!" A parent saw her comments and contacted local attorney John Paragano, who wants Knox's job taken away.

While Knox supporters believe her First Amendment rights should be protected, others are rallying for the school board to fire her. *The New York Times* reports that members of the group sent hundreds of emails and made calls to the district on Thursday demanding they dismiss Knox because of her comments.

Garden State Equality, a statewide civil rights group, has organized a protest of the next school board meeting on Tuesday at 7 p.m.

"The district is taking the matter very seriously," said Union's superintendent of schools, Patrick Martin, according to the *Times*. "We are running a thorough investigation. We will take all appropriate actions."

Although Knox's Facebook page was removed from public view, the *Times* reported that she defended her views with other Facebook users, at times referring to God and her Christian beliefs. She wrote that while she had friends and loved ones who are gay, she believed their lifestyle is "against the nature of God" and that the school was "not the setting to promote, encourage support and foster homosexuality."

Even Edward Barocas, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union in New Jersey, said the teacher's comments should be protected by the First Amendment.

"Although we do not agree with the sentiments expressed on Ms. Knox's personal Facebook page, her beliefs and comments are protected by the First Amendment," he said in a statement.

Several groups have already popped up on Facebook, both in support and in opposition of the school teacher.

On one page, Facebook user Dave Aune writes, "I think she has a constitutional right to freedom of speech, but I also support her view."

In response to someone citing separation of church and state as a reason for why Knox should be dismissed, Ellie Gray writes, "Separation of church and state means that a government school doesn't fire employees based on their religious beliefs."

Knox is not the first teacher to face heat for expressing her views on Facebook. In August, Florida high school "teacher of the Year" Jerry Buell was suspended when he used his personal page to denounce New York for allowing same-sex marriage. He was reinstated three days into the school year after a short investigation.

The school board is currently looking into the Knox case and has not come to a decision yet. The teacher was escorted from the premises, but Martin declined to confirm whether she was

suspended, 1010 WINS reports.