



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 12, 2018

Teacher Fired for Refusing to Call Female Student “He”

A transgender female high-school student in Virginia has succeeded in getting one of her teachers fired after he refused to refer to her as “he.”

On December 6, the West Point, Virginia, school board voted 5-0 to terminate Peter Vlaming, a French teacher at the city’s high school, after he rejected their demand that he use male pronouns for a female ninth-grade student who would prefer to be a boy, and who is undergoing some medical procedures to synthesize “gender transition.”



As reported by the Richmond, Virginia, *Times-Dispatch*, Vlaming “told his superiors his Christian faith prevented him from using male pronouns for a student he saw as female,” and while he agreed to refer to the student by her chosen male name, he balked at using male pronouns when referring to her — which, reported the paper, made her “feel uncomfortable and singled out.”

Predictably, the school district sided with the girl, warning Vlaming that he had to concede to the student’s wishes or lose his job. Such “discrimination” as Vlaming demonstrated, explained West Point Schools Superintendent Laura Abel, “leads to creating a hostile learning environment. And the student had expressed that. The parent had expressed that. They felt disrespected.”

While the district’s policy was updated a year ago to compel teachers and district employees to bow to the demands of transgender students, Vlaming’s attorney, Shawn Voyles, argued that the policy includes no guidance on the use of gender pronouns, and no clause addressing the rights of those, such as Vlaming, whose convictions prevent him from following the policy. “One of those rights that is not curtailed is to be free from being compelled to speak something that violates your conscience,” Voyles said.

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After its decision to terminate Vlaming, the district released a statement saying that it had a responsibility “to ensure all students have a safe and supportive school environment where they can learn and thrive. We do not and cannot tolerate discrimination in any form, or actions that create a hostile environment for any member of our school family. Mr. Vlaming was asked repeatedly, over several weeks and by multiple administrators, to address a student by the pronouns with which this student identifies. The issue before us was not one mistaken slip of the tongue. Mr. Vlaming consistently refused to comply going forward — including in a statement made at the hearing — a willful violation of school board policy.”

As reported by LifeSiteNews.com, the day after Vlaming’s termination, a large group of West Point High School students staged a walk-out in support of the teacher. “He’s an amazing man,” one of the students, Wyatt Pedersen, told a local news station. “I think he really was going with what he believed was right and it’s really unfair that he’s being punished for that, especially in such a dramatic way.”



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Another student, Forrest Rohde, who organized the walkout, said that the protest was not aimed at the transgender student. “The child is going through a lot,” he said. “We shouldn’t be directing this towards her. We should be directing this towards the school board.”

Vlaming’s attorney, Shawn Voyles, compared the district’s hands-off approach to the walkout to its reaction to students’ initial attempts to defend their teacher. “We are glad to see that West Point Public Schools permitted this peaceful protest today,” said Voyles. “That was not the case in November when the students began circulating a petition to return my client to his job. As a student testified at the hearing ... the high school principal actually confiscated the petition. It unfortunately took a threat of legal action by a student to have it returned.”

The *Times-Dispatch* reported that it was not initially clear “if Vlaming’s firing will lead to a wrongful-termination lawsuit. Vlaming said he was interested in pursuing a legal appeal, but he wanted to consult with his attorney before announcing further steps. ‘I have to research how we would do that, what that would entail,’ Vlaming said. ‘I do think it’s a serious question of First Amendment rights.’”



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