



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 6, 2013

Catholic School Faces Backlash After Firing Lesbian Teacher

A Catholic high school in Columbus, Ohio, is being targeted for possible legal action because school officials fired a veteran teacher at the school after they discovered that she is a lesbian. Carla Hale, who taught for 19 years at [Bishop Watterson High School](#), told the [Columbus Dispatch](#) that she was terminated in March after a parent noticed an obituary for Hale's mother that included the name of Hale's lesbian partner. The parent complained to the school, resulting in Hale being fired from her job as a teacher and coach.



A letter to Hale from school officials recounted the policy of the diocese, which reads: "In keeping with the moral values advanced by the teachings of Christ, the tenets of the Catholic Church, and the policies and regulations of the diocese and school, Catholic school personnel are expected to be examples of moral behavior and professionalism." The letter then informed Hale: "Your written spousal relationship violates the moral laws of the Catholic Church.... As a result, your contract with Bishop Watterson High School is terminated effective Thursday March 28, 2013."

The *Dispatch* noted that "a contract between the Roman Catholic Diocese of Columbus and the Central Ohio Association of Catholic Educators says teachers can be terminated for immorality or serious unethical conduct," including homosexuality, which the Catholic Church has always considered sinful. But a Columbus city ordinance "makes it a misdemeanor for an employer to discriminate against an employee based on sexual orientation," explained the paper, and an additional city law "states that an employer cannot have a policy that discriminates based on sexual orientation. Those who are found guilty could face up to 180 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine."

Hale, who said she is a Methodist, has filed a grievance with the diocese over the termination, and her attorney, Thomas Tootle, said that if that route to reinstatement of her employment fails, they will consider filing a discrimination complaint with the city. The director of the city's Community Relations Commission said the non-discrimination measure includes no exemption for religious organizations, so the school and diocese may have a legal fight on its hands.

Not surprisingly, word of Hale's firing mobilized some students and others to launch a petition on Change.org demanding that the school bring back the lesbian instructor. "Discrimination is something that people have fought for generations," the petition reads, claiming that the "most prominent form of discrimination in today's society is discrimination on the basis of sexuality. Carla Hale, a beloved teacher at Bishop Watterson High School, was fired by the Diocese of Columbus because of her sexuality." The online campaign admonishes that "when we allow injustice to go unnoticed and unpunished, we all are hurt. We have an obligation to Ms. Hale and ourselves to make sure the Diocese of Columbus hears us and decides to overturn its decision."

The petition, which has supposedly garnered nearly 121,000 signatures as of May 6, then makes the



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terse demand of school officials: "Reinstate faculty member Carla Hale and apologize for discriminating against her on the basis of sexuality."

Tootle decried the fact that his client could be fired simply because she is a practicing homosexual "The lack of protection forces people into the closet," he told the *Dispatch*. "If you are at risk of being terminated at any time and for any reason, including your orientation, would you come out, especially when you're working for the Catholic Church?"

Hale said the morality clause that was used to fire her could also justify the termination of other staff members at the school who are violating Catholic Church rules through co-habitation, divorce, or even using birth control. "If we really want to open up that door ... where do you start and finish if you're talking about immoral behavior within the Catholic Church?" she wondered.

Tootle agreed, telling the [National Catholic Register](#) that "there are many things that the Catholic Church considers immoral, but why is this treated any differently than adultery, divorce, or birth control? It does seem to be a situation where the Church picks and chooses like they are at the buffet."

But the [Catholic News Agency](#) noted that similar moral clauses "have been invoked to end the employment of heterosexual teachers at Catholic schools as well. In 2009, Xavier High School in Appleton, Wisconsin, declined to renew the contract of a male physical education teacher and baseball coach, reportedly after it learned he spent the night at a girlfriend's house."

Joshua Bowman of catholicvote.org pointed out that "Catholic schools entrust their teachers with a special responsibility to provide spiritual formation and act as role models for their impressionable charges. Faithful Catholic parents have every right to expect that teachers at a Catholic school should be faithful ministers of the gospel and witnesses to Christ in both their public and private lives."

The Diocese of Columbus released a statement regarding the termination of Hale, and, speaking in "general terms," said that all school personnel hired by the diocese agree at the beginning of their employment to "abide by the rules, regulations, and policies of the Catholic Diocese, including respecting the moral values advanced by the teachings of Christ." Continued the statement: "The Catholic Church respects the fundamental dignity of all persons, but also must insist that those in its employ respect the tenets of the Church. Personnel who choose to publicly espouse relationships or principles that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church cannot, ultimately, remain in the employ of the Church."



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