



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 15, 2012

Diversity Officer Suspended for Supporting Traditional Marriage

The head diversity officer for Washington, D.C.'s Gallaudet University, the nation's premier college for the deaf, has been suspended from her position after it was revealed that she had signed a petition in Maryland to overturn that state's same-sex marriage law. Gallaudet's president, T. Alan Hurwitz, issued a statement indicating that Dr. Angela McCaskill, who signed the petition in July, had been placed on administrative leave immediately pending an investigation.



Dr. McCaskill is the first deaf black woman to earn a doctorate from the university, and has worked at Gallaudet for 23 years, beginning the diversity position last year.

Another faculty member reportedly spotted McCaskill's name on the Maryland petition, and filed a complaint against her with the university. Dr. McCaskill explained that she had signed the petition at her church, after her pastor had spoken about the biblical position on traditional marriage. She said that her husband had pointed out the petition and she signed it as she was leaving church.

"It recently came to my attention that Dr. McCaskill has participated in a legislative initiative some feel is inappropriate for an individual serving as Chief Diversity Officer," Hurwitz wrote on the university's Facebook page. The 160,000 signatures on the petition was enough to place the law before Maryland voters, who will have an opportunity to repeal it on November 6. Hurwitz said that he would "use the extended time while she is on administrative leave to determine the appropriate next steps taking into consideration the duties of this position at the university."

McCaskill's [office is charged with providing support](#) for minority groups at the university, including homosexual and other sexually confused students, and from all reports she was doing a satisfactory job. [PlanetDeafQueer.com](#), a website catering to deaf homosexuals, reported that according to university sources, "Dr. McCaskill has been an ardent supporter of Gallaudet's LGBTQA Resource Center, which was formed in October 2010 and is part of the Office of Diversity and Equity for Students."

The deaf homosexual website quoted an anonymous university staff member as saying that "in her role as Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. McCaskill has made many advances for deaf people of color, LGBT, and other minorities at Gallaudet." And a student at the school was quoted as saying that McCaskill has been "a great ally to the LGBT community and supported many of the LGBTQA Resource Center's programs."

Surprisingly, McCaskill has received support from a group working to retain same-sex marriage in Maryland. "We strongly disagree with the decision to put the chief diversity officer on leave and hope she is reinstated immediately," said Josh Levin, campaign manager for Marylanders for Marriage Equality. "Everyone is entitled to free speech and to their own opinion about Question 6, which is about treating everyone fairly and equally under the law."



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That opinion was echoed by the conservative, Christian group working to overturn the same-sex marriage measure. "I join an ever-growing number of Marylanders in expressing my complete dismay over Gallaudet University's decision to place Dr. Angela McCaskill on administrative leave for signing the marriage referendum petition," said Derek McCoy, chairman of the [Maryland Marriage Alliance](#). "Quite simply, it was well within her rights to sign the petition."

Robert Muisse, senior counsel with the [American Freedom Law Center](#), told Focus on the Family's CitizenLink.com that McCaskill's situation is becoming more common as leftist intolerance increases. "This is just a microcosm of a really larger problem that I'm seeing across the country," Muisse said: "Christians who want to engage in their religious belief and express their views are being punished."

Tony Perkins of the [Family Research Council](#) weighed in on the issue, saying that an individual should "no more be punished for signing a petition than they should be for voting. This is a basic citizen's right to participation in our democratic process. Gallaudet University claims to believe in diversity, but clearly their definition of diversity doesn't allow for dissent when it comes to marriage."

Perkins noted that up until just a few years ago, "a decision punishing an employee for engaging in the democratic process would have been jaw-dropping. However, Gallaudet University's discriminatory action reflects the troubling trend of intimidation and bullying tactics against those who uphold marriage as the union of one man and one woman."

Even the [Baltimore Sun](#) newspaper condemned the decision to suspend McCaskill, demanding in an editorial that "University president T. Alan Hurwitz owes her an apology and immediate reinstatement." The editorial noted that while how a person votes is considered private information, "virtually everything else about our participation in the electoral process is public: what petitions we sign, what parties we register with, when we vote, which candidates we donate money to and how much. Might someone consider it inappropriate if a chief diversity officer registered as a Republican, since that party's platform opposes gay marriage?"

The paper declared that Gallaudet "has a right to evaluate Ms. McCaskill based on how well she does her job, not what she thinks, and there appears to have been no indication before this incident that she was insensitive to the needs of gay and lesbian students on campus."

[IntheCapital.com](#), a news site focused on Washington, D.C., noted that "according to UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh, Hurwitz's act of putting McCaskill on paid administrative leave because she had 'participated in a legislative initiative' could be perceived as a criminal violation." The news site quoted D.C.'s city code as stating that any person who "by threats or intimidation, interferes with, or attempts to interfere with, the right of any qualified registered elector to sign or not to sign any initiative, referendum, or recall petition" may be guilty of a crime punishable by a \$10,000 fine and a year in jail.

While the petition McCaskill signed was in Maryland, not D.C., Volokh argued that the city code could still "indirectly apply" should McCaskill decide to file a civil suit against the school.

Photo: Gallaudet University



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