

The *Peter Vlaming* Case

Case Name: *Vlaming v. West Point School Board*

Case Status: Lawsuit filed Sept. 30, 2019 in Circuit Court for the County of King William (VA).

Significance: Whether a public school can require a teacher to contradict his core beliefs by insisting he refer to a female student with male pronouns.



Background: In his seventh year teaching French at West Point High School in Williamsburg, Va., Peter Vlaming was given an ultimatum: Either he contradict his core beliefs by using male pronouns while referring to a female student, or he would face termination from the job he loved. Peter works hard to make his students feel welcomed and respected. When a female student asked to be referred to by a masculine name, Peter agreed. Peter was willing to use—and consistently did use—the student’s preferred name instead of her given name, and attempted to avoid the use of any pronouns in order to accommodate the student. Yet, none of that was enough for the school board. The school board didn’t care how well Peter treated this student, it was on a crusade to compel conformity. Peter was directed to cease “avoiding the use of male pronouns” to refer to the student, even when the student wasn’t present. The board fired Vlaming when he stated he couldn’t in good conscience comply.

Alliance Defending Freedom filed the case, *Vlaming v. West Point School Board*, in the Circuit Court for the County of King William. Peter is suing the school board for breach of contract and for violating his rights under the Virginia Constitution and commonwealth law.

Key Points

- This isn’t just about a pronoun, it’s about what that pronoun means.
- Freedom—of speech and religious exercise—includes the freedom *not* to speak messages against our core beliefs.
- Public schools shouldn’t require teachers to endorse a belief with which they disagree.

Key Facts

- Peter called this female student by a preferred masculine name, and agreed to avoid pronoun usage in front of this student.
- Peter made it clear that he would accommodate this student by not using a pronoun that now offends the student; at the same time, he can't use a pronoun that offends his conscience.
- This was never about anything Peter said or did; only about what the school was demanding he say. Peter was fired because he couldn’t agree to the school board’s demands that he refer to a female student by male pronouns—including when no student was in the room.

The Bottom Line: Peter went out of his way to accommodate this student; his school fired him because he wouldn’t contradict his core beliefs.