

Federal Court Clears Path for Physician Assistant’s Lawsuit Against University of Michigan Health

Court allows Free Exercise, Equal Protection, and Title VII claims to proceed.

Grand Rapids, MI—Federal Judge Jane Beckering late yesterday allowed Valerie Kloosterman’s core claims to proceed in her lawsuit brought by First Liberty Institute against University of Michigan Health-West. Ms. Kloosterman was terminated after she sought a religious accommodation from affirming statements that violated her conscience, referring patients for sex-obscuring procedures and experimental drugs, and from using biology-obscuring pronouns. The opinion allows the lawsuit’s Free Exercise, Equal Protection, and Title VII religious discrimination claims to proceed.

You can read the decision [here](#).

“It is intolerant of employers to demand that medical professionals like Valerie abandon their religious beliefs in order to remain employed,” said Kayla Toney, Associate Counsel for First Liberty Institute. “We are pleased that the court recognized that our claims that Michigan Health violated Valerie’s constitutional rights and federal employment law have merit and that her lawsuit should proceed. Employers in our nation need to take notice that religious employees cannot be discriminated against because of their beliefs.”

In her decision, Judge Beckering recognized Ms. Kloosterman’s “exemplary” record and that her “vibrant faith informs how she does her work as a medical professional.” The court ruled that Michigan Health officials demonstrated “hostility toward the sincere religious beliefs that motivated her objection to the training module.” The court cited *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* for the principle that “official expressions of hostility” violate the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. The court also found merit in Ms. Kloosterman’s Equal Protection and Title VII claims, because she showed that University of Michigan Health accommodated the preferences of other providers yet refused to accommodate her religious beliefs. And the court rejected Michigan Health officials’ attempt to rely on qualified immunity, finding that Ms. Kloosterman “sufficiently alleged at this stage that each Individual Defendant violated her . . . clearly established freedom of religion and Equal Protection rights.”

In 2021, after mandatory “diversity and inclusion” training, Ms. Kloosterman asked for a religious accommodation because she could not affirm statements about gender that violated her Christian beliefs. During follow-up meetings, a Michigan Health diversity representative called Kloosterman “evil,” blamed her for gender dysphoria-related suicides, and told her she could not take the Bible or her religious beliefs to work with her. Three weeks later, she was fired.

In the federal lawsuit filed in October 2022, First Liberty attorneys argued that Michigan Health “targeted Ms. Kloosterman for termination because she requested an accommodation for her religious beliefs.”

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

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