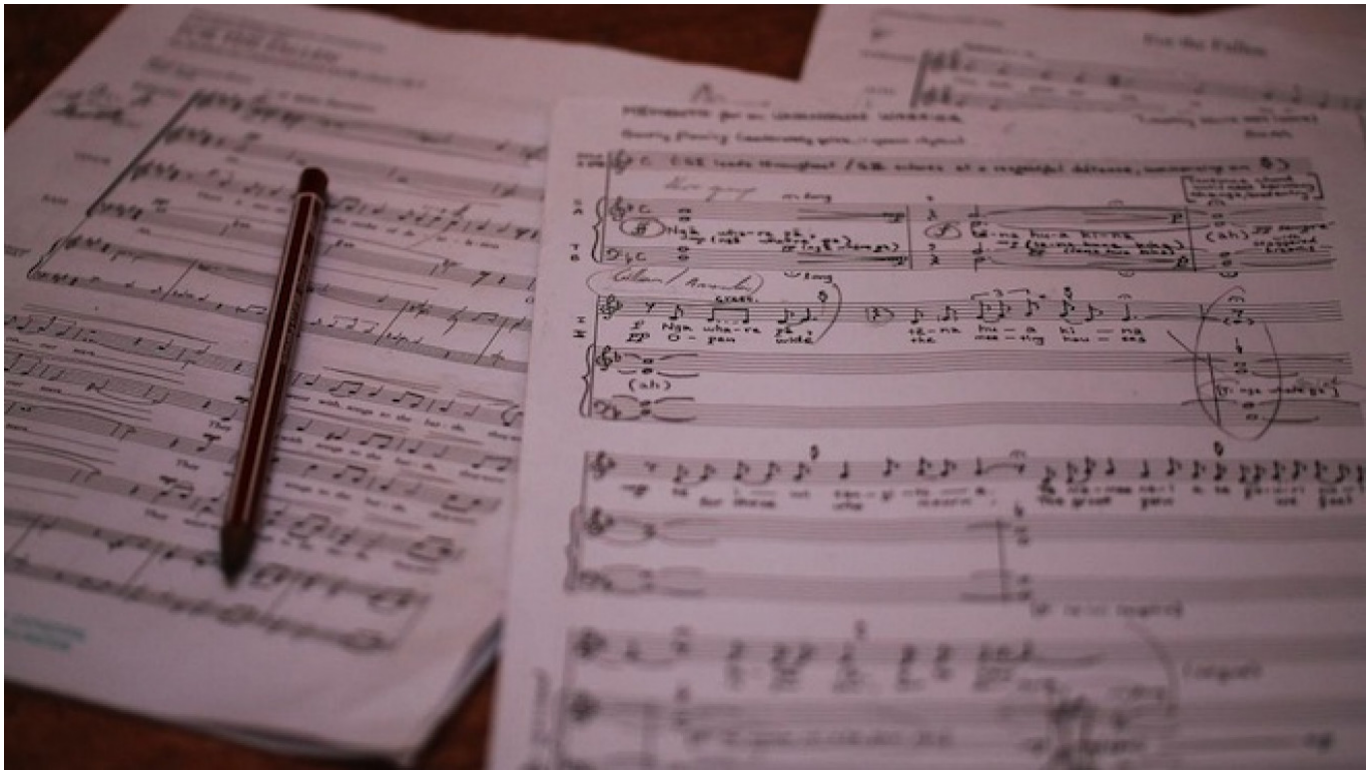
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Lesbian Teacher Fired After Russian Anti-Gay Activist Complains to School

By Anna Dolgov

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A music teacher was fired for an "amoral action" after an anti-gay activist outed her as a lesbian.

A music teacher at a St. Petersburg school for disabled children has turned to a court after she was fired for "amoral action" after an anti-gay activist outed her as a lesbian, an LGBT rights group said in a statement.

Lawyers from St. Petersburg rights organization Vyhod ("Way Out") have filed a lawsuit with a city court on behalf of the music teacher, who was dismissed last month from School No. 565, and are seeking to get her reinstated and win compensation for lost wages and moral damages, the group said Monday in a statement.

Vyhod and Russian media reports refrained from disclosing the teacher's name in an apparent attempt to protect her from additional attacks, though it has been posted on some anti-gay webpages.

"During all the years of my work at the school I gave all I had to my favorite profession, developing a love for arts and music among the children," the teacher, who had received a number of teaching awards, was cited by Vyhod as saying. "Considering the capabilities of our children with moderate to severe developmental disabilities, I tried to make every lesson interesting, educational and fun."

While a widely criticized Russian law prohibits the promotion of homosexuality to minors, the young woman had not disclosed her sexual orientation to her co-workers or students, nor was she involved in any LGBT rights movement, news site Meduza reported.

However, she appears to have come out on social networks, attracting the attention of anti-gay activist Timur Bulatov, who on his VKontakte social-networking page notes: "Russia is hell for [gays]. Let them get used to it!"

Based on a letter of complaint written by Bulatov, the school's principal called the teacher to a meeting in his office, where a local educational official told her: "You belong to the LGBT, you cannot work with children," according to the teacher's account of the incident cited by the Meduza news site.

After the teacher refused to resign voluntarily, the school dismissed her for an "amoral action, incompatible with a continuation of work as a teacher," according to a copy of the personnel order quoted by Meduza.

In a separate meeting with the teacher, school principal Stanislav Vinogradov indicated that he was far from eager to fire her and called the anti-gay activist a "psychopath," but added that the school was under considerable pressure from educational officials to have her dismissed and had "no choice," Meduza reported, citing a recording of the conversation made by the teacher.

The dismissal marks the first known case in Russia when a school officially referred to a teacher's sexual orientation as grounds for dismissal, a leader of Vyhod's legal team, Ksenia Kirichenko, said in a statement, adding that in previous cases, LGBT teachers were pressured into resigning.

In a well-publicized case that occurred shortly after Russia adopted its ban on gay "propaganda" in 2013, a geography teacher in the far-eastern city of Khabarovsk, Alexander Yermoshkin, lost his job following complaints by local anti-gay activists. But in a difference from the newly fired music teacher, Yermoshkin had been staging one-man rallies for LGBT rights on the city's streets, giving school administrators legal grounds under the new law to seek his dismissal.

Bulatov, the anti-gay activist who complained about the music teacher, had bragged about having 29 LGBT teachers fired from Russian schools, Meduza reported.

"This teacher openly shows herself on social networks as an amoral lesbian who, according to social network data, lives with another equally ill girl," Bulatov was quoted as saying in his complaint to the St. Petersburg school.

"A denial of traditional family values is considered amoral and incompatible with conducting

this kind of labor activity," he said.

The teacher said that she had put in a lot of time and effort into helping her students, including many with autism, to begin responding in class.

"If we are learning a song about a fir tree, I bring a fir tree [branch] and touch the palms of everyone's hands with this branch, so that they feel the fir needles — then the song is remembered better," she was quoted by Meduza as saying.

A spokeswoman for St. Petersburg's education department, Larisa Kuzmina, denied allegations that her department had anything to do with the dismissal, saying that schools are managed by municipal district administrations, Meduza reported.

While local district officials could not immediately be reached for comment, the teacher said one official told her that she would never be able to work as a teacher again, the report said.

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