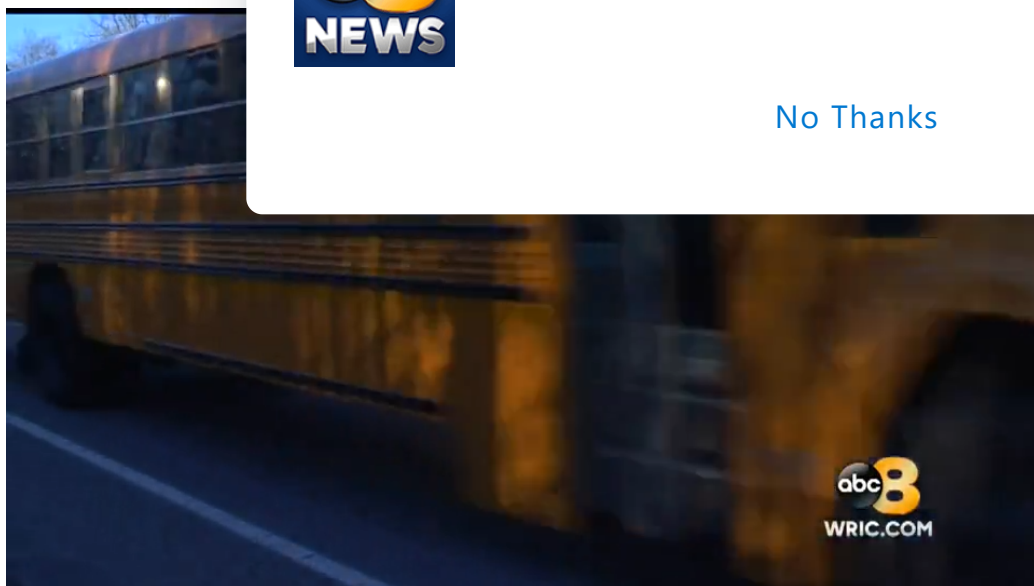


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TAKING ACTION

Former teacher files lawsuit against Chesterfield Schools, says she was told to be more feminine

by: [Kerri O'Brien](#)

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CHESTERFIELD COUNTY, Va. (WRIC) — A former Chesterfield County teacher claims she was told by administrators she was too masculine and needed to be more feminine.

Dina Persico, a former civics teacher, has filed a **federal lawsuit** against Chesterfield County Public Schools alleging gender discrimination. She believes she was repeatedly harassed because she is a lesbian.

“Flamboyant
appearance is
intent and the



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Perisco tells 8
Providence M

rs. ““Your
aid with

other staff at

She claims she faced repeated reprimands about her appearance.

“It was suggested that if I seemed more feminine, I would be less intimidating as a person.”

Persico says her principal even suggested she change her wardrobe.

“If you just throw a skirt on once in a while, we wouldn’t have any of these problems,” Persico recalled.

The former teacher also says she was once banned from the ladies room.

“I went to put my hand on the door and he actually blocked me and was like, ‘no, that’s really not appropriate, you going in there with all the, you know, young female students,’” Perisco said, adding that she felt humiliated.

“It was an assault on my person, and then it was like your basic human dignity, I just need to use the restroom. That’s all I need to do.”

“This is gender discrimination,” Persico’s attorney, Colleen Quinn, added.

“Just this on-going barrage of criticism because of how she dresses,” Quinn said.

Button downs, a sweater or fleece, pants and athletic shoes — that was typical teaching attire for Persico.

“I’m just not a fashion person,” she said. “Simple shirt, I put on a second layer because I get cold.”

Her employee
image.”



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Chesterfield C

“appropriate

Persico taught in another Virginia school district for 20 years without issue.

Online, she gets rave reviews from former students. She also has piles of notes from students praising her work in Chesterfield.

If you ask her about teaching civics, something she dreamed of doing since she was a kid, she lights up.

“I absolutely loved it,” she said. “You get to teach kids what it means to be a citizen and how to participate in government.”

She tells 8News the alleged constant badgering started when the principal at Providence Middle School learned she is gay and married to a fellow teacher.

Her wife, Erin Guthe, said “It’s very clear to me that my wife was discriminated against because of the way that she expresses her gender.

“I think I and women like me are given more of a pass because we appear more feminine.” Erin Guthe

Guthe says she even witnessed some of the attacks on Persico’s appearance.

“I was actually in the meeting where the assistant principal told her to change her hairstyle,” Guthe recalled.

“They even suggested I get bangs,” Persico added.

Eventually it all took its toll, and Persico suffered a mini-stroke. The doctor told her it stemmed from work.

“She said it w

Guthe says th

“She has lost

Persico was a



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Persico was a [lawsuit](#) that she and her attorney hope leads to change.

“I just felt like this was a case that cried out for awareness,” Quinn said.

“Number one, they get some training and understand what they did to me was wildly inappropriate,” says Persico.

as8News reached out to Chesterfield for comment, but we were told Chesterfield Schools does not comment on pending litigation.

[CLICK HERE](#) to view the entire federal lawsuit. You can hear more of our conversation with Persico in the ‘Web Extra’ below.

WEB EXTRA: Former Chesterfield teacher files federal lawsuit alleging gender discrimination

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