



## Sireen Hashem says she was fired from New Jersey high school for being Palestinian, Muslim

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History teacher Sireen Hashem said she was fired from Hunterdon Central Regional High School in New Jersey last June and claims she was let go for discriminatory reasons.

“Ms. Hashem’s outrageous treatment was due to her national origin, religion and race. Ms. Hashem is a Palestinian, Arab and Muslim. The High School exposed her to harassment, discrimination, hostile environment and disparate treatment. As a result she was working in

fear, humiliation and degradation. No person deserves to work in such an environment. The Federal and State law protect Mrs. Hashem under such treatment. We are seeking justice as a result. Many students and parents supported her because she was a fantastic teacher,” attorney Omar Mohammedi told Palestine in America.

However, the superintendent of the school, Christina Steffner, released a statement refuting Hashem’s claims.

“Neither the district nor I have been served with a complaint, but I have read some of Ms. Hashem’s allegations against me in the media. I respect the personnel confidentiality rights of all employees, and it would be inappropriate for me to publicly comment about job performance or personnel matters. However, I want to very clearly state that Ms. Hashem’s allegations against me are untrue. I have never made a personnel decision based on any improper purpose. The statements attributed to me are factually wrong, and may even be defamatory. It is unfortunate that the district and I will have to defend this case, but will do so vigorously, so that the real facts may be presented in court. After an appropriate review of the allegations, further comments may be provided.”

Hashem was fired from her position last June and according to NJ.com filed a religious discrimination lawsuit in federal court.

Per NJ.com:

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*The 17-page lawsuit details two years of interactions between Hashem and those named as defendants leading up to the decision not to renew her contract with the district. The defendants include Hunterdon Central Regional District Superintendent Christina Steffner, high school Principal Suzanne Cooley, and two teachers who supervised her, Robert Zywicki and Rebecca Lucas.*

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According to the lawsuit, the issues with the school began October 2013 when a student complained about Hashem showing the class a clip featuring Malala Yousafzai, a young Nobel Prize winner.

In a meeting following a complaint against Hashem, Cooley told her that she should not mention Islam or the Middle East in her class and “should not bring her culture, life experience or background into the classroom,” the lawsuit states.

Last April, Hashem was notified that her contract would not be renewed. She petitioned the decision and pleaded her case before the board of education June 15. Her employment was terminated June 30. Mohammedi could not discuss evidence but said he will serve the district soon and won’t stop “until he gets [Hashem] justice.”

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### About Rania Salem

Rania Salem is a Palestinian-American student. She is a sophomore at Loyola University Chicago with a major in Political Science and a minor in Biology. She is an active member of Students for Justice in Palestine at Loyola.

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