

Montgomery County, Maryland public schools remove teachers expressing pro-Palestinian sentiments

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At least three teachers in Montgomery County, Maryland have been placed on administrative leave over social media posts expressing pro-Palestinian viewpoints and criticizing Israel, while a fourth has been placed on leave for signing a pro-Palestinian email. Montgomery County Public Schools has justified the decision to suspend the four teachers by falsely claiming their statements were antisemitic.

In the first case, Tilden Middle School world studies teacher Sabrina Khan-Williams was placed on leave in mid-November. In screenshots of Khan-Williams' now-private social media posts, the teacher expressed shock and disbelief at the extent of Israel's invasion of Gaza, as well as US support for the genocide, which has led to the deaths of at least 20,000 people since October 7.

In one post, Khan-Williams shared a video highlighting state violence directed at Palestinians who protest peacefully in Israel, writing, " Hamas did not start this. They were just the perfect vehicle for Zionists to continue its [sic] apartheid."

In another post, the teacher wrote, "If this was about the hostages, [Israel] would have immediately accepted the ceasefire. Just saying." Another video shared by Khan-Williams, of a man singing about the killing of innocent Palestinians, said the "U.S. loves genocide."

Khan-Williams also shared a screenshot of a term called "hamaslighting," with an accompanying definition: "a form of gaslighting used to distract or confuse when a country, specifically Israel, carries out genocide against innocent Palestinians. This tactic is commonly used by exclaiming 'but Hamas!' in the middle of every conversation."

Right-wing media outlets such as the Daily Wire seized on Khan-Williams' posts and her other role at the school as a "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" teacher to smear

her pro-Palestinian sentiments as akin to lunacy and intimidation.

In the second case, Takoma Park Middle School teacher Angela Wolf, the department head of English Language and Development, was placed on leave on November 30.

Among Wolf's posts, she used hashtags such as #donotgiveup and #WarCrimes. In one post, she shared a cartoon by Carlos Latuff showing an Israeli tank taking aim at the NICU unit of the Al-Shifa hospital in North Gaza and a speech bubble coming from the tank saying, "Enemy in sight!"

Wolf shared a post on October 28 saying, "It is not war—it is a slaughter. Israel determined to make Gaza uninhabitable." In addition, on November 16, she hailed bus drivers in Northern Virginia "who refused to transport Zionists to the pro Israel rally" in Washington D.C. from Dulles International Airport, saying "their solidarity with the victims of Israeli genocide should be commended."

Media reporting on Wolf's social comments investigated her posts much further back than the beginning of the latest war, highlighting in particular a post she made on December 20, 2020, in the midst of the tumultuous US presidential elections and surging cases of COVID-19 worldwide.

In that post, now private but captured in a screenshot, Wolf wrote, "Folks are angry at the wrong people." She then listed five billionaires who live in Montgomery County—Dan Snyder, Bernard Saul, David Rubenstein, Ted Lerner and Mitchell Rales—saying, "None of these people invented anything useful [or] have done a damn thing to further the needs of the communities."

Wolf continued in that post, "They are the gluttons and thieves. (They accumulate this kind of wealth through abusing workers.) During the pandemic (and every other moment of life), there is no good reason on this earth why

folks can't get healthcare. ... Everyone should [have] a safe place to live, free from fear of eviction, and healthy food."

The third teacher censored for her social media posts is Anike Robinson, an art and English teacher at Westland Middle School in Bethesda, who was placed on leave on December 5. Westland Principal Alison Serino wrote a letter to parents that day saying some parents had brought Robinson's social media activity to her attention, and that they were "of an antisemitic nature."

Robinson, denying any claims that she is antisemitic and calling Serino's letter a character defamation, shared three posts with the local outlet MoCo360 that she believes caught the attention of parents.

In one post on Instagram, Robinson shared an image of a bomb draped with the flag of Israel and aimed at a child standing amid rubble. Another post, shared on TikTok, showed Robinson's students sitting outside and read, "Art class outside and I have a heavy heart. Praying for justice so there might be peace." The post displayed a graphic with a fist raised before the Palestinian flag.

In the third post, Robinson shared a graphic saying, "The world is watching. Palestine will be free. Colonized people across the world stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people against Israel's settler colonial state-sanctioned apartheid program of genocide back[ed] by U.S. imperialism. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free. Decolonization is not a metaphor."

Speaking to MoCo360, Robinson, daughter of the late Randall Robinson, a leading human rights activist and lawyer involved in the Free South Africa Movement, said, "Anything that I ever said, anything critical would have been about the Israeli government and its policies and its history of policies not only there but also as they relate to apartheid in South Africa and how much they helped support that apartheid. So, anything that I ever said was not about those groups at all. It was not political in nature unless compassion is also considered political now."

In addition to these three educators, MCPS placed Argyle Middle School math teacher Hajur El-Haggan on administrative leave on November 20 because her email signature contained the phrase, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

El-Haggan's case has been taken up by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which filed a discrimination lawsuit against MCPS earlier this month with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The complaint alleges MCPS discriminated against El-Haggan, a Muslim Arab-American, on the basis of her

race, religion and national origin.

The complaint further claims El-Haggan was targeted for wearing pins she made herself with phrases like "Free Gaza" and "Free Palestine."

The assault on the free speech rights of these teachers, in one of the most Democratic-leaning counties in the country, comes amid a far-reaching attempt by the American state to intimidate and block students from protesting against the vast crimes being perpetrated by Israel, fully backed by the Biden administration. In the latest escalation, Congress has launched a McCarthyite witch-hunt against college presidents at some of the most prominent institutions in the country for their supposed failure to address a completely fabricated wave of antisemitism on college campuses.

The witch-hunt to silence critics of the US-backed genocide in Gaza takes on hysterical dimensions. In Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Pine Crest High School student Jad Abuhamda, a Palestinian American teenager, was expelled in November in response to social media posts by his mother, a math tutor at the school, opposing Israel's slaughter of thousands of children in Gaza.

In Georgia, no doubt stoked by the witch-hunt atmosphere stirred up by Congress and the corporate media, Warner Robins Middle School social studies teacher Benjamin Reese threatened to beat and murder a student over a December 7 incident in which the student questioned the Israeli flag hanging in Reese's classroom. Reese flew into a rage over the student's taking offense at the flag "due to Israelis killing Palestinians." Reese accused the student of antisemitism as he screamed in her face, yelling obscenities. Arrested and charged with making terroristic threats and cruelty to children, Reese has since been released on bond, but is not permitted to return to the classroom. The local district attorney plans to seek an indictment from a grand jury in January.



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