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HEADLINE: Professor faces deadline for hearing on discrimination complaint

DATELINE: PROVIDENCE, R.I.

BODY:

A Rhode Island College professor called in for a hearing for failing to discipline two students who allegedly made racist remarks has not scheduled the meeting and wants the college to call off its probe.

The deadline for Lisa Church to schedule the meeting that college administrators have requested is Friday.

Church wrote to administrators this week, saying she does not think the meeting should take place.

"I acted both reasonably and responsibly in refusing to consider any kind of punishment of anyone involved in the conversation," Church said in the letter. "To have punished the participants in the conversation in any way for their offensive remarks would have been to violate their First Amendment rights, and would have put both myself and the college at grave risk of a lawsuit."

Church and a civil liberties advocacy group who supports her want Rhode Island College to stop pursuing the complaint.

College officials have said they are simply investigating the complaint, as they do each time a complaint is filed.

According to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a Philadelphia-based nonprofit educational foundation that supports Church, the dispute stems from an incident on Feb. 19 in which the three student-mothers with children in RIC's preschool discussed welfare and race.

The professor was not present during the discussion. After one student took offense at remarks made by two others, the student asked Church, who was the coordinator for the cooperative preschool, to discipline the other women.

Church suggested the matter should be mediated and that a sensitivity training session should be held.

The student ultimately complained to the college, accusing Church of discriminatory conduct.

FIRE representatives charge that even investigating the matter is inappropriate.

"There is nothing to investigate. Dr. Church uttered no offensive words, took no discriminatory action, and upheld her legal duties under the Constitution of the United States with care and integrity. her actions spared the college serious legal liability and probable public ridicule," the foundation said in an open letter released Friday.

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Document 1 of 1

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