

School leader sued for harassment

JUSTIN MURPHY

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The founder of Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School faces a lawsuit from a former administrator who alleges he made lewd comments about her, then forced her out after she complained to the board of trustees.

Jennifer Bulling, who spent three years as the school's executive director of operations and finance beginning in April 2012, filed the suit against the school and its founder, Dennis Francione, in federal court last week. A preliminary investigation by the New York State Division of Human Rights found probable cause she faced discrimination. According to the lawsuit, Francione began sexually harassing Bulling in April 2014. It is alleged, among other things, that he said Bulling "always has her legs open with her boyfriend, and that's why she could not focus on work." Francione also allegedly said, in reference to Bulling, that he "only hires pretty girls." Bulling was temporarily suspended from work without any prior disciplinary actions in June 2014, two months before her wedding. According to the lawsuit, she then complained to the school's board of trustees, which took no action.

From then until the following April, Bulling alleges Francione retaliated by eliminating her position for the following year, then making her uncomfortable until she resigned.

In exchange for gender and sexual discrimination, Bulling is requesting lost wages and compensatory damages.

Francione and Board of Trustees President Kevin McCormick both declined to comment Tuesday. Before opening the charter school in 2012, Francione was principal of the since-closed Global Arts Media High School at the Franklin campus in the Rochester City School District. Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School is located on Hart Street, off St. Paul Street, in a cramped space it leases from the Rochester City School District. More than half the teachers left in 2014-15, and more than one in five students was suspended during that school year, according to state data. The school's charter expires this year and must be renewed by the New York State Education Department's Board of Trustees.

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Dennis Francione, charter school founder

