



## THE CENTER FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Wadsworth Museum Employee Fired for Questioning Equity Plan**

### ***CIR Files Federal Suit for Reinstatement***

Washington, D.C. -- Today, the Center for Individual Rights filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of Kate Riotte, a former Curatorial Assistant at the Hartford, Connecticut Wadsworth Atheneum Museum, which fired Ms. Riotte in March 2021 for asking for clarification about a proposed museum-wide equity policy.

Riotte was a member of a Task Force that met regularly to discuss a proposed Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion policy then being considered by the museum. Wadsworth officials said the new policy was to "guide all that we do -- from the scope of our programs and services...to our hiring practices and internal culture."

As part of her Task Force duties, Riotte received an email asking her to review a draft web page explaining the policy and to reply with any "thoughts or concerns."

In her reply, Riotte wondered whether striving to achieve racial equity was attainable and desirable for the Museum. She also pointed out that the web page used the term "systemic racism" without defining that term.

Riotte faced instant backlash for her email. One of the Task Force chairs suggested she was “a proponent for the (sic) allowing the continuation of oppression.” He insisted that the museum could attain racial equity by “implementing changes in hiring practices, wage disparities, and the destruction of the dominant white male Eurocentric narrative that permeates through the current culture and language of the museums (sic) as a whole.”

Later, two of the museum’s senior staff called Riotte to inquire about her motivation for sending the email. They told her it was her job to educate herself about white supremacy, “allyship,” and other similar concepts that were integral to the new policy. One said the email was offensive because it was addressed to the Task Force co-chairs, one of whom was a person of color.

Several days later, Michael Dudich, Deputy Director of the Museum, terminated Riotte for the "views" she expressed in her email.

CIR filed suit under a [Connecticut law that protects the right to free speech for private employees](#). The complaint alleges that the museum violated Riotte’s right to free speech by retaliating against her for expressing views and asking questions about issues of public concern that were raised by the museum’s policies.

Terence Pell, President of the Center for Individual Rights, said, "Kate Riotte's questions were professional and respectful. She should never have been fired for asking questions about Wadsworth's plan to re-orient all of its activities around the idea of equity."

[Read More About the Case](#)

[Read the Complaint](#)

The Center for Individual Rights is a public interest law firm based in Washington DC that frequently defends the free speech rights of individuals. To read more about CIR, visit our webpage: [www.cir-usa.org](http://www.cir-usa.org)

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