

Nebraska nun barred from wearing habit in classroom



Incredible but true: A nun in Nebraska who teaches in a secondary school has been told that she is not allowed to wear her habit in the classroom. 37-year-old, Sister Madeleine Miller, was shocked to learn that, under a little-known law nearly a century old, habits were banned.

The vaguely worded ban prohibits teachers from wearing any sort of religious clothing, from burqas to yarmulkes.

“I could have been arrested, jailed, fined or had my license taken away if I had tried to teach,” Miller said on Tuesday.

Now, state lawmakers are looking to end the ban, which was passed in 1919 under pressure from the Ku Klux Klan amid a national wave of anti-Catholic sentiment.

The law is rarely enforced but came to the attention of the senator whose district includes Norfolk Public Schools, where Miller had hoped to work. Miller said a school administrator told her the district would be happy to hire her, but she couldn’t wear her habit in class.

Thirty-six states had adopted similar bans on religious garb at various points, but Nebraska and Pennsylvania are the only ones that have yet to repeal them, said Speaker of the Legislature Jim Scheer, sponsor of the repeal bill.

[*Read the rest.*](#)

The AP reports:

Miller — who holds a Nebraska teaching certificate, a bachelor’s degree from Wayne State College in Nebraska and a master’s degree from the University of Chicago — ended up taking a job at a Catholic school in neighboring Iowa. She said she initially considered filing a lawsuit with help from the Thomas More Law Center, a national religious liberties group, but decided against it in hopes that

lawmakers would fix the issue themselves.

Church rules require sisters to wear the habit virtually all of the time, except when working in a communist country or cleaning with harsh chemicals that could damage the blessed garments. Miller sought the job as a public school substitute because none of the local Catholic schools had any openings.

Nebraska is considering the proposal in the midst of a broader debate over religious garb. In November, lawmakers in the lower house of the Dutch parliament approved a ban on “face-covering clothing,” including Islamic veils and robes such as the burqa and niqab. In 2010, France approved a so-called burqa ban that has since been blamed for encouraging Islamophobia and giving Muslim extremists more ammunition to incite hatred.

The proposal to repeal Nebraska’s ban faced little resistance Tuesday during a legislative hearing. The measure drew support from a diverse coalition including Catholic groups and the American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska.

UPDATE: The sister in question is a member of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters. A Nebraska TV station covered the story:

Sister Rita Marie Tofflemire knows Sister Madeleine Miller is a good educator.

But that didn’t matter when Miller applied for an open substitute teaching position with Norfolk Public Schools last year. What mattered is Miller, a Missionary Benedictine Sister, is required to wear her habit in public, and it’s against Nebraska law for a teacher to wear religious garb in a public school classroom.

“Because of a garb that she wouldn’t be able to teach, so there was sadness in that,” Tofflemire said. “And I guess I was surprised that that is still on the books.”

Deacon Greg Kandra