

# Four Tenured Professors Sue Centenary University for Wrongful Termination

*Citing tenure protections and anti-discrimination laws, four Professors file suit challenging their terminations.*

NEWTON, NEW JERSEY, UNITED STATES, February 17, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Attorneys for [Morris, Downing & Sherred, LLP](#) have filed a civil damages action in the Superior Court of New Jersey (Patterson et al. v. Centenary University at al., SSX-L-00069-21) claiming that Centenary University's firing of four esteemed tenured professors violated their hard-earned academic tenure rights, rights guaranteed to them by Centenary's Constitution. The lawsuit also alleges that Centenary and its senior administrators and former Board of Trustees Chairman illegally targeted Patterson and Yoshimine because of their advanced ages and Adamo due to their transgender status.

"It's no secret that academic tenure has been under attack in American higher education," said Professor James Patterson, a former departmental chair who also served for years as Centenary's Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost and is a member of the Executive Committee of the New Jersey State Chapter of the American Association of University Professors. "This lawsuit is an effort to stem that tide, and hold Centenary, the institution that the four of us devoted our professional lives to, responsible for the commitments it made to each of us."

The action alleges that Centenary violated its Constitution—which permits the termination of tenured faculty only where the school is facing "financial exigency," is eliminating an entire academic program or department, for disability reasons, or for performance-based cause—by the surprise firing the four professors while they were grading their students' final exams in mid-December 2019. The complaint notes that Centenary did not claim that any of these four narrow exceptions applied, and that even if Centenary had justified the terminations under the Constitution, it would have had to have taken many important procedural steps, including consulting with the Faculty Senate about the firings, attempting to redeploy tenured professors to other positions, and otherwise making efforts to protect plaintiffs' jobs. Centenary ignored all these requirements as the administration and Board of Trustees moved unilaterally to terminate plaintiffs in the final weeks of the Fall semester.

The lawsuit also alleges that Centenary specifically and discriminatorily selected Professors Patterson and Yoshimine, both in their 60s, for termination because of their age, and that

Professor Chris Adamo, who is transgender and was highly visible in trans outreach and education efforts on campus, was targeted due to their gender expression, both clear violations of New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination.

"While Centenary's conduct in firing our clients is outrageous given the many sacrifices they made to the school over the years, we are even more troubled by the school's targeting of this particular subset of tenured professors," said [Paul Hunczak](#), a partner at Morris, Downing & Sherred, LLP.

In addition to the attorneys' fees and punitive damages available under New Jersey law in discrimination claims, the lawsuit seeks monetary damages to offset at least some of the serious economic and professional injuries plaintiffs have suffered because of Centenary's violation of their rights. Given the professors' ages and the difficulty of obtaining tenure at other institutions, especially in the post-Coronavirus climate, plaintiffs anticipate that their economic and professional damages will be substantial.

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