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Teachers support embattled colleague

Page wins important legal battle but the war drags on

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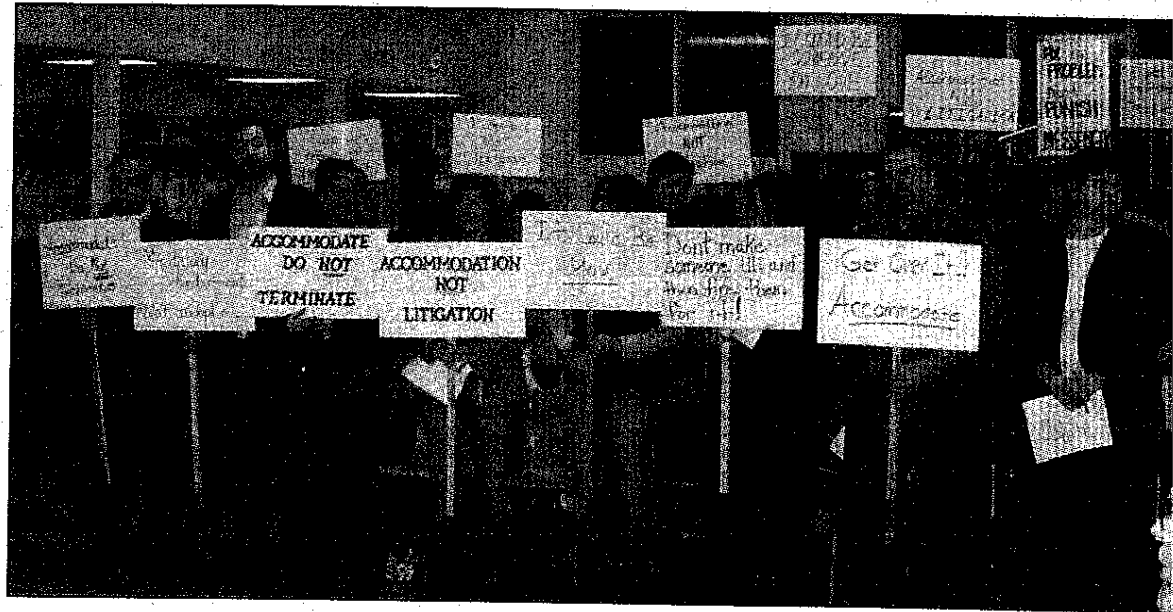
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LIBERTY, NY — The signs carried messages such as “Accommodate, do not terminate” and “Don’t make someone ill and then fire them for it.” Dozens of supporters, most of them faculty members of the Liberty Central School District, turned out to the school board meeting on March 12 to protest the school district’s treatment of librarian Angela Page.

Page faces a teacher tenure hearing on March 26 and 27. The school board wants her fired. Page, who has been unable to spend time inside the Liberty Middle School building since 2004, is seeking to continue to work for the district, perhaps from home, in any of a number of capacities such as grant writing or acting as a virtual librarian.

Page’s three doctors said she suffers from Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, a condition in which the slightest whiff of perfume, or chemicals from the paper used in dryers to eliminate static cling in clothing, or a smell of a myriad of common modern substances, can incapacitate her. And her doctors said the condition was caused by years of working in a library filled with mold caused by leaks in the roof.

Now, the New York State Worker’s Compensation Board



Faculty members from Liberty Central School turn out to support former librarian Angela Page, who is facing a termination hearing.

TRR photo by Fritz Mayer

has signaled its absolute agreement. On March 9, Page got a letter from a three-member panel of the board, which said in essence that the illness is real, and it was caused by conditions in the school building.

The letter was good news for Page, who has gone without income for a year because the school district’s insurance carrier fought the worker’s compensation claim. The district now has 30 days in which to appeal this latest decision. Page has appeared in court at least six times over the workers’ compensation matter, which is a separate legal process from

the teacher tenure hearing.

However, for Page, who almost always wears a respirator when going into public buildings, the battle has never been about not working. She has repeatedly said she wants to return to work in some capacity. Her condition would require that any work location be absolutely free of synthetic fragrances and other materials, such as any products containing petroleum byproducts. If the district finds this too difficult to arrange, Page said it might be easiest for her to perform work from home. She submitted various propos-

als to former superintendent Larry Clark, but they went nowhere.

The new interim superintendent, Ed Rhine, said it would cost the district a lot more money to create a position for Page that doesn’t exist now that would allow her to work from home, than it would be to end her employment.

The colleagues and friends who spoke in Page’s support had a different view. Charlie Barbuti, a former board member, said, “It’s time for the board to stop listening to the lawyers and start looking for a bold solution.”