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## **Teachers file suit against union under paycheck-protection law**

DATELINE: OLYMPIA

BODY:

Five teachers have sued the Washington Education Association, contending the teachers' union illegally took their money to use for political causes.

The teachers stand to collect only about \$50 each at the most, but the lawsuit is part of an ongoing battle by conservative groups against the WEA's political action.

The teachers are seeking class action status for their lawsuit.

The five who filed suit were not WEA members, but paid a fee equivalent to union dues to cover the cost of collective bargaining on their behalf. The suit alleges that their money was used for political activities without their authorization.

The lawsuit claims the WEA violated Washington's "paycheck protection" law, Initiative 134. The plaintiffs are demanding that about \$200,000 be returned to nonunion teachers.

WEA spokesman Rich Wood said union leaders had not seen a copy of the lawsuit, which was filed late Monday in Thurston County Superior Court, and could not comment on it.

The teachers are being represented by lawyers from the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, which has successfully attacked the WEA in the past over campaign finances, and the Virginia-based National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, a nonprofit group devoted to fighting "compulsory unionism abuses."

"The union should have no right or authority to take any money from them," said Stefan Gleason, vice president of the legal defense foundation.

"State law prohibits WEA's misuse of these wages for political contributions," said Steve O'Ban, attorney for the teachers. "The only way to fully right this wrong is to get their money back."