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King County to settle public defender lawsuit for \$31 million

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Six years after a public defender sued King County to enroll in its retirement system, a tentative settlement awarding public defenders pension benefits backdated to 1978 has been reached.

The approximately \$31 million proposed settlement would go toward county retirement contributions and would also make public defenders working at four non-profit groups county employees with full benefits by July 1, according to a King County news release.

Kevin Dolan, a public defender for the Associated Council for the Accused, sued the county in 2006 on behalf of employees of those four groups seeking the same retirement benefits as county employees.

In response to Dolan's lawsuit, the state Supreme Court ordered King County to allow the contracted public-defense employees to enroll in the county's Public Employees Retirement System as of April 2012.

The agreement still needs to be approved by the Metropolitan King County Council and Pierce County Supreme Court Judge John R. Hickman to be finalized, but the county is already working on how to reorganize its network of public defenders according to a release.