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## King County workers sue over pay

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At least 1,000 King County employees should have received more pay because they made less than other county employees in similar jobs or were never placed in a higher job classification as planned, according to a lawsuit filed by three county employees.

The employees are seeking class-action status for the suit, contending that many should have received retroactive pay raises dating to 1998 as part of the county reorganization plan.

The suit, filed last week in King County Superior Court, stems from the 1994 merging of King County government with the Metro sewer-and-transit agency, when county officials were to ensure that employees performing similar tasks received equal pay. Under the reorganization, union employees and some nonunion employees were reclassified some years later in new job titles and received pay raises, retroactive to January 1998.

But about 1,000 nonunion employees in management and administrative positions throughout the county did not receive retroactive pay, said Judith Bendich, an attorney representing Amy Duncan, Donna Jones and Yinka Otusanya.

Bendich said many employees were fulfilling job responsibilities in a higher job classification but never got the higher pay rate. She also said many were not placed in the county's 10-step salary schedule that called for a 2 percent increase each step.

The King County Executive's Office, as a policy, would not comment on a pending lawsuit, a spokeswoman said yesterday.

But King County Executive Ron Sims wrote to those affected employees in November, explaining that the county cannot afford retroactive pay because of the county's financial problems.

"When the classification and compensation project first began, King County's financial circumstances were dramatically different than they are now," he wrote. "Today, King County is faced with a severe budget crisis, the closure of parks and pools, significant layoffs, and dramatic reductions in essential services."

That brought little solace to those who didn't get retroactive pay. Bendich said many employees were told by their bosses that they would get their raises and their job classification adjusted.

"Supervisors were telling people, 'Hang on, this is going to happen.' But they held on and this has not happened for them," she said.

The plaintiffs are seeking deferred compensation dating to 1998, plus interest.

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