



GREATER SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Labor Council

Union workers win record \$30M back pay

By Renee Dudley | Sunday, May 16, 2010



In what is being called the costliest settlement of its type in state history, the financially strapped Trial Court system must shell out \$30 million in back wages to thousands of unionized clerical workers, the Herald has learned.

In a decision reached May 7, an arbitrator ruled that the Trial Court broke its contract with Office and Professional Employees International Union, Local 6, by refusing to pay the negotiated 3 percent pay raises since 2007.

“We have members that have suffered foreclosures and bankruptcy waiting for their raises,” said Robert S. Manning, general counsel for Local 6. “It is sadly ironic that court workers have had to bring a case to force the judicial system to obey the contract signed by its own chief justice.”

Officials from the Trial Court said they were unable to pay the negotiated raises because of a lack of funding from the state. Chief Justice for Administration and Management Robert A. Mulligan declined comment pending a meeting with union officials.

In addition to the \$30 million in back pay, the Trial Court must find \$17 million in unfunded raises for the union employees for the next budget year, starting in July, said Superior Court Justice Peter W. Agnes Jr., president of the Massachusetts Judges Conference.

An official who has been involved in state unions for more than three decades, and who asked not to be named because he was not directly involved in the court arbitration, said the payout is the largest grievance settlement he's seen in the Bay State. He said it is unusual because the Trial Court must find the money to pay the settlement from its own budget.

"They basically have to eat the money," he said.

Manning said 75 percent of the union's 3,200 state court workers are women who earn an average annual salary of \$37,000. Many are heads of household, he said.

Among them is Norwood resident Terrie Caprigno, an office manager in Boston Municipal Court's Brighton division who has worked for the court system for 27 years. Caprigno, who said her husband has worked as a school bus driver since being laid off from his previous job, was counting on her raises to pay her two children's Catholic school tuition.

"We had to take our daughter out already," said Caprigno, who said she is owed \$8,000 in back pay. "Our son got accepted to Catholic Memorial for next year, but it's just too expensive for us."

Though she's happy about the settlement, Caprigno said she is discouraged her family will have to wait for the payout.

"We're told it's going to be 18 months or longer," she said. "That's not going to help me send my son to private school. We worked our hours - we should be getting our money."