

Philadelphia Hospitals Named in Suit

Written by Eric Mayes Tribune Staff Writer Tuesday, 24 November 2009

Seven local hospitals face a federal lawsuit for allegedly cheating their employees by automatically deducting lunch breaks from their time cards while they required them to work through the breaks. According to papers filed by Thomas & Solomon, a Rochester, N.Y. based law firm, Jefferson Health System, Temple University Health System, University of Pennsylvania Health System, Mercy Health System, Albert Einstein Healthcare Network, Aria Health System and Abington Memorial Hospital all illegally deducted pay from their hourly employees time cards even though the employees were on the job.

The hospitals' "computerized timekeeping system automatically deducts one half-hour from employees' paychecks each day for a meal break," said court papers. "Despite having this policy, defendants do not ensure that ... [employees] perform no work during the breaks. [Employees] do in fact perform work during those breaks and are not paid for that time."

Further, the suit alleges that the hospital required employees to work knowing they are not getting paid.

"Management has gone so far as to direct [employees] to work during their unpaid meal breaks even though ... management knew that they would not be able to have a full meal break," according to court papers.

The law firm estimated that approximately 8,000 employees had their pay illegally cut. They ranged from administrative assistants to nurses aides and laboratory technicians and home health-care nurses.

"It's costing employees millions and million of dollars," said attorney Thomas Nelson.

Several of the hospitals contacted by The Tribune and named in the suit would not comment on the allegations.

In addition to the federal action, all seven of the hospitals face similar suits in state court.

"We've filed similar suits in Pennsylvania and other states and been very successful with them," Nelson said.

The firm said employees of the hospital that may have questions or may wish to join the suit should call (877) 272-4066.