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THE WASHINGTON TEACHERS' UNION FILES LAWSUIT ON BEHALF OF LAID-OFF TEACHERS

Washington—On Wednesday, Oct. 7, the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) filed a lawsuit in D.C. Superior Court to enjoin Michelle Rhee and the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) from terminating hundreds of WTU members, most of whom are classroom teachers. The union is asking the court to reinstate the laid-off teachers until the terminations have been reviewed via the parties' dispute resolution process.

"The attempt by DCPS to disguise a mass discharge of teachers as a "RIF" [reduction in force caused by a 'budget shortfall'] is merely an effort to discharge teachers without review, without real objectivity or transparency, and without the due process to which they are entitled under the WTU collective bargaining agreement," stated WTU President George Parker.

The WTU has asked DCPS to stay the discharges pending arbitration, but so far DCPS has refused. In the interest of allowing the parties to fairly review what is happening to these teachers, the WTU's lawsuit seeks an injunction to maintain the status quo pending arbitration so that an arbitrator's review will not be futile.

On Oct. 2, DCPS announced the mass discharge of 266 WTU members, including 229 classroom teachers, because of what DCPS has told the union is a "budget shortfall" for the 2009-10 school year. This claim is highly suspicious and needs to be closely reviewed. DCPS cannot reconcile a larger budget for a smaller student population with its reckless hiring of more than 900 new classroom teachers over the summer. The school district's hiring of 900 new teachers without the resources to support all its teachers shows obvious mismanagement, and as a result, DCPS will lose more than 200 classroom teachers, the majority of whom are certified, experienced teachers with positive performance evaluations.

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