

## **State agrees to \$11 million deal over health benefits**

By Sharon Pian Chan

Seattle Times staff reporter

The state of Washington yesterday settled a class-action suit with part-time community-college instructors, agreeing to pay them \$11 million for its failure to provide summertime health-insurance benefits.

In June, the state Supreme Court ruled that part-time instructors who work at least half time are eligible for health insurance during the summer. After that decision, the state paid \$1.5 million to cover part-time instructors' insurance for the summer of 2003.

Yesterday's agreement, which must be approved by the state Legislature and King County Superior Court, settled how much the state will pay for the years prior to 2003. It also expanded the benefits to include part-time instructors who teach half time at more than one community college.

"The most important thing about (the settlement) is that the long-term, part-time faculty will be treated more like the full-timers," said Stephen Strong, an attorney who represented the instructors. "They basically do the same kind of work and work the same duration as full-timers."

More than 1,500 instructors in the state who have worked half time since 1999 will be affected. Half-time instructors teach two courses per quarter during the school year, while full-time instructors teach three courses.

Two community-college instructors, Eva Mader and Theresa Knudsen, filed the lawsuit in 1999. Mader had taught half time for 21 years in North Seattle, while Knudsen was an instructor in Spokane for 10 years.

The two also sued for retirement benefits. On that issue, the state settled 18 months ago for \$12 million.

*Sharon Pian Chan: 206-464-2958 or [schan@seattletimes.com](mailto:schan@seattletimes.com)*