

# Washington L&I To Move Ahead With WHL Investigation

By [Kevin Uretsky](#). Published Thursday, December 4th, 2014



The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries is moving ahead with an investigation into the Western Hockey League and the relationship between the league's U.S. based franchises and those teams' players. The department is moving ahead after receiving advice on the issue from the Washington Attorney General's office.

At the heart of the issue is whether or not the 16 and 17 year old players can be considered employees of for profit businesses or just players/student-athletes.

The original child labor complaint was filed against one of the four WHL franchises in the state in 2013.

L&I will not discuss which Washington based team the complaint was filed against or whether the complaint came from a player, his family, or another source. Washington is home to the Tri-City Americans, the Seattle Thunderbirds, the Everett Silvertips, and the Spokane Chiefs.

L&I's Matthew Erlich tells Your Local ABC the department will not discuss the specific issues the individual claim raises. However, while the WHL and its parent league the CHL recognize players as student-athletes, some believe they are actually employees of their individual franchises.

Players in the WHL receive a regular stipend and one year of scholarship money from teams' education funds for each year spent in the league. Most use that money to attend college following the end of their WHL careers.

There is no timetable for the completion of this investigation.

WHL commissioner Ron Robison issued the following statement in September:

"The Western Hockey League (WHL) Member Clubs in Washington are aware that the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries has been taking a look at junior hockey with regard to the status of our amateur players. Our WHL Clubs in Washington have responded to the government, providing requested information and explaining that our players are student athletes playing in a developmental hockey league, and participating in and contributing to their sport the same way as other amateur athletes. We are advised by the Department that, as of today, no decision has been reached in the matter.

Amateur hockey players have competed within the WHL in the State of Washington since 1977. The WHL certainly recognizes that undoubtedly any changes to the status of junior hockey players could impact the status of other amateur athletes in the state as well."