



## Laid-off IQT workers launch class-action lawsuit



Hundreds of former call centre workers in Montreal and Oshawa, Ont., are fighting for their final paycheques and benefits after being laid off with little notice.

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TORONTO — Former employees of call centres in Ontario who claim they were fired without receiving their last paycheque have filed a class-action lawsuit against the U.S.-based company they used to work for.

About 600 workers arrived to their jobs at IQT Solutions Ltd. in Oshawa, Ont., on July 15, 2011 to learn they were being dismissed and would not be receiving a paycheque for their last two weeks of work, the employees allege in their statement of claim.

Workers Bob Brigaitis and Cindy Rupert on Tuesday filed the \$30-million lawsuit against the company's shareholders, affiliated companies and its directors on behalf of the laid-off Ontario workers.

They are seeking to recover \$20 million in wages and severance they say they are owed as well as \$10 million in aggravated and punitive damages.

"All of the employees of IQT were shocked to be treated like this after many years of loyal service to the company," Brigaitis, a former operations manager for an Oshawa call centre, said Wednesday in a news release.

"We are seeking compensation for the pay we are owed, but also to make sure companies like this don't walk away from their responsibilities to their employees."

Some of the employees had worked for the company for 10 years when they were laid off. The employees are also claiming the company owes them vacation pay and severance.

The company also laid off about 450 workers in Laval, Que., and 140 in Trois Rivieres, Que.

IQT has not responded to media requests from The Canadian Press since the layoffs took place and their website is no longer operational.

Calls to two men named as defendants in the statement of claim and believed to be partial owners of the company, Alex and David Mortman, were not immediately returned.

The allegations in the lawsuit have not yet been proven in court.

The Ontario government continues to work with former employees to try to recover lost wages, said Ministry of Labour spokesman Matt Blajer.

The ministry has received 261 claims from employees who say the company owes them money. It has issued 184 orders to IQT that call on them to pay the wages within 30 days.

Blajer declined to speculate as to what they would do if the company has not paid.

"We expect them to pay," he said.

The employees will deduct the amount of money the company pays from the lawsuit, said the group's lawyer Ted Charney, but he believes that's unlikely to happen.

"The odds of IQT paying these employees anything is a million to one," he said.

The orders aren't going to be useful because they are only as effective as the company's ability to pay, said Charney.

He said the company has moved most of its assets back to the United States and therefore the Ontario branch doesn't have any money to give to the employees.

"They haven't, since July 15, made any offers to pay, they haven't made any public statements and they haven't made any proposals to pay anybody anything."

The group will need to have the lawsuit certified as a class action by a Toronto judge before they can proceed. This means that if the case reaches trial, the decision by the judge will apply to all the class members -- in this case the employees.

The company has the option to appeal 30 days after the orders have been issued.

The Quebec government has also been working with the employees who were laid off there.