

Investigation into Washington's WHL teams expands

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The investigation into a child-labor complaint filed with the State of Washington against the WHL's four Washington-based teams is being expanded.

Matthew Erlich, a spokesperson for the Washington State Department of Labor and Industry, contacted media outlets last Thursday to inform them that the investigation of the complaint, which was filed by an unnamed party in September of 2013, will continue. The Department of Labor and Industry made the decision after soliciting advice from the State Attorney General's office, Erlich said.

“We'll be seeking more information now from the WHL teams in the state,” Erlich said.

The four WHL teams in Washington are the Everett Silvertips, Seattle Thunderbirds, Spokane Chiefs and Tri-City Americans.

The complaint alleges that WHL teams violate the state's minimum wage laws. Players are compensated with room, board, a small monthly stipend and one year of college paid for each season played in the league. The complaint says the monthly stipend, which numbers in the hundreds of dollars and varies based on the player's age, does not meet the Washington State minimum wage of \$9.32 per hour.

WHL commissioner Ron Robison issued a statement in September saying, “Our WHL clubs have responded to the government, providing requested information and explaining that our players are student athletes playing in a developmental hockey league, and participating and contributing to their sport the same way as other amateur athletes. . . . 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.”

The complaint comes at a time when similar legal challenges are being made in Canada on behalf of Canadian Hockey League players. Challenges are also being made in the U.S. with regards to the status of collegiate athletes and whether they should be considered amateur.

There is no timetable for concluding the investigation. Erlich said the investigation can be stopped or the complaint can be settled at any point. However, Erlich said the investigation would likely require months to complete.