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Suit alleges racial bias at aid agency

By [H.J. Cummins](#), Star Tribune

A legal services agency that represents disadvantaged Minnesotans is being sued by two employees who claim race discrimination on the job.

Two legal secretaries -- one black and one Indian -- said they had no opportunity to apply for promotion to office manager, positions that went to two white staff members in their Minneapolis Legal Aid Society office in south Minneapolis.

The lawsuit, filed Friday in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis, also claims a pattern of discrimination in advancement at Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance (MMLA), an umbrella organization that includes the Minneapolis Legal Aid Society, St. Cloud Area Legal Services, Western Minnesota Legal Services, and the Minnesota Disability Law Center.

It represents low-income and elderly clients in family, housing, immigration and education legal issues.

MMLA Executive Director Jeremy Lane denied any discrimination in the promotion decision.

Lane also cited a Minnesota Department of Human Rights investigation that found no probable cause that the agency acted unfairly.

In the lawsuit, filed Friday, D. Lynne Daniels and Mescal N. Urich complain that by simply announcing the two promotions in January 2005, the agency violated its own policy to post internal openings.

The suit also says the office's fifth staff member, a black, did later receive a promotion to office manager at the society's north Minneapolis site, but at lower pay than the other two.

Daniels and Urich are seeking damages of more than \$75,000, including back pay, and legal expenses.

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