The Mackinac Center made a dual announcement at the Hall of Justice. First, officials from the free-market think tank announced its new legal wing -- the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation (MCLF), which it bills as a public-interest law firm.

Second, officials announced that MCLF filed suit in the Michigan Court of Appeals against the Department of Human Services (DHS) for creating a “shell corporation” to “shanghai” more than 40,000 home-based day care business owners into a government employees union.

The action, which was filed on behalf of two owners, Sherry LOAR and Dawn IVES, seeks to stop the DHS from “improperly” siphoning “union dues” out of state subsidy checks meant to provide assistance to low-income parents. Or at least that’s the plaintiffs’ side of the story.

“I had never been informed about the union or a vote,” Loar said. “I just opened up a letter I received in December and the letter informed me that I was in a union. I’m not opposed to unions. Everything has a place. I grew up in a union family. But when we enter my door, this is my home.”

IVES also said she had known nothing of the union until being told she was in it.

Reporters asked Wright if a key point in the suit would be the question of whether or not most of the members of the 70,000-member union had ever had a chance to vote on its formation.

He said, “no,” the issue is that, regardless of any vote, the process that created the shell corporation was unconstitutional.

Wright described the creation of the union as “extraconstitutional.”

“Two government agencies cannot conjure up the power to change the law simply because they are working together.”

A video that tells Loar and Ives’ story, as well as the complaint, legal brief, a backgrounder and other information related to the case, can be found at www.mackinac.org/9051.

DHS officials declined to discuss any aspect of today’s press conference, going as far as not confirming or denying any information the Mackinac Center presented as fact.

The response from DHS was brief.

“DHS does not comment on pending litigation,” said DHS Spokeswoman Colleen STEINMAN. “That is all we will say at this time.”