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## Mackinac Center foundation sues over Taylor teachers' contract that bucks right-to-work



By Lori Higgins

*Detroit Free Press Education Writer*

The Mackinac Center Legal Foundation today filed a lawsuit over a recently ratified union contract in the Taylor School District that includes a 10-year union security clause that will guarantee union dues be paid – just weeks before the state's right-to-work law goes into effect March 28.

The right-to-work law makes it illegal to require financial support of a union as a condition of employment.

The foundation filed the lawsuit in Wayne County Circuit Court on behalf of three teachers, according to a press release issued this afternoon. The lawsuit was filed against the Taylor Federation of Teachers, the Taylor School District and the district's Board of Education.

The three teachers -- Angela Steffke, Rebecca Metz and Nancy Rhatigan -- object to the union security clause. The foundation is asking the court to rule that the clause is invalid and void.

David Hecker, president of the American Federation of Teachers-Michigan, of which the Taylor union is an affiliate, said the Mackinac lawsuit has no legal ground.

"It's obviously a tactic on their part to try to scare employers and unions, which obviously isn't going to work," Hecker said. "These contracts were negotiated between the school district and the union. They were ratified overwhelmingly by the school board and the federation of teachers. It's totally 100% legal."

The nearly 500-member union earlier this month approved two things separately:

- By a vote of 365 to 79, a four-year contract in which they agreed to a 10% pay cut, a change in health insurance and more out-of-pocket health care expenses
- By a vote of 362-83, the 10-year union security clause.

"This is really a union insecurity clause because rather than proving its worth to members, the union is forcing all teachers to continue paying dues or agency fees through 2023," said the foundation's senior attorney, Derk Wilcox. "This is a desperate attempt by the union to circumvent Michigan's right-to-work law and preserve its own power at the expense of teachers."

The foundation is a public interest law firm that is part of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a Midland-based conservative think tank that has supported right-to-work since the organization began in 1988.

Steffke, a special education teacher, said she thinks the union and the district "colluded and conspired to circumvent" Michigan's right-to-work law, according to the press release.

"This is about our civil rights," Steffke said. "This is about fighting for our freedom of association and fighting against coercion in the workplace."

Linda Moore, president of the Taylor Federation of Teachers, referred reporters to Hecker. District officials could not be reached for comment.

Hecker said the lawsuit has no merit, for one, because the right-to-work law hasn't taken effect.

"It's not the law in Michigan today," Hecker said. "The Legislature had the option to give the law immediate effect. It did not."

The lawsuit says the clause is illegal because Michigan law prohibits a term of a labor contract from exceeding the term of the actual contract and because it binds successive school boards to the clause.

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