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### Retirees sue SBC over pension

By Kimberly Johnson

HARTFORD — A Milford man filed a lawsuit Monday against SBC Communications Corp. and Cingular Wireless, seeking \$123 million on behalf of five retirees and more than 500 current employees.

William Parry, a retired SBC and Cingular employee, and four fellow retirees allege the companies deprived them of full pension benefits based on guidelines set in their union contract.

Parry joined SNET Corp. in 1970. SBC bought SNET in 1998, and in 2001 transferred its wireless workers to Cingular. SBC owns 60 percent of Cingular.

Local Cingular employees were employed under the same union contract as SBC workers.

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court here.

In December 2002, Parry said he took an early retirement package based on the promise of a lump sum payment. After leaving the company, the 32-year veteran technician said he received a notice stating that the payment amount was incorrect.

Parry appealed the amended pension amount, but claims he has not received any answer from Cingular to his appeal.

"We have gone through an extensive procedure with actuaries and pension experts to determine whether our original figures were correct," he said.

"And they all agree that our original figures were the correct figures."

Although a similar issue was settled a few years ago with legal action, SBC officials said the lawsuit came as a surprise.

"We need to study the suit," said SBC spokeswoman Beverly Levy. "It appears to be related to SBC employees and retirees and Cingular employees and retirees.

Until our attorneys study it further, we can't comment today."

The money owed to the retirees makes up nearly half of their pensions, said Thomas G. Moukawsher, the principal lawyer handling the case at Moukawsher & Walsh LLC in Hartford.

Cingular did not honor contract stipulations that allow long-serving employees who have not reached the full retirement age of 65 to collect full pension benefits, including interest, Moukawsher said.

"The typical person worked over 30 years and a lump sum payment would be \$500,000," he said. "They're given half of that. In fact, the average loss is \$243,000 per person. They're disadvantaged over the choice they made."

SBC has 60 days to respond to the filing, Moukawsher said. In the meantime, he said he is working on getting class-action status for the suit because the pension plan affects 500 current employees who are at least 55 years old and have 20 years on the job, or have 30 years on the job, regardless of age.

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