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Washington's Supreme Court holds state in contempt over education

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By Victoria Cavaliere

SEATTLE (Reuters) - Washington state's Supreme Court on Thursday found the legislature in contempt for failing to uphold a court order to come up with a plan to boost its education budget by billions of dollars over the next five years.

State lawmakers are not meeting a "paramount duty ... to make ample provisions for the education of all children residing within its borders," the court said in a unanimous ruling.

The court did not impose any sanctions but said it could do so next year if lawmakers do not complete a plan on how to fund schooling for kindergarten through 12th grade by the end of the legislative session.

The ruling stems from a 2012 state Supreme Court decision that found the state had failed to "amply" fund public education for Washington's 1 million school children.

That decision called for the state, which has budgeted \$18.2 billion for education spending in the two-year fiscal period ending in July 2015, to boost that figure by \$3.3 billion in total by July 2019.

The money was to be spent on classroom supplies, transportation and targeted education plans for struggling students.

The 2012 decision related to a 2007 lawsuit filed by the Network for Excellence in Seattle on behalf of parents Matthew and Stephanie McCleary, who argued the state was violating the U.S. Constitution because it was not fully funding what it costs to pay teachers, provide transportation for students and maintain buildings.

The state had argued that it had adequately funded education and said diverting tax revenue could lead to shortfalls in other public services.

Governor Jay Inslee said on Thursday the ruling came at a "critical moment" in Washington's history.

"I urged lawmakers to act this year and agreed with the court that we must do more to adequately fund education, which I believe is both a constitutional and moral obligation," he said in a statement.

Lawmakers were ordered to present a timeline to implement the changes but failed to meet benchmarks after the 2014 legislative session, the court ruled.

Last week, the Supreme Court convened a hearing in which the state admitted it had not complied with previous orders but asked for more time to outline its budget plan.

(Reporting by Victoria Cavaliere; Editing by [Mohammad Zargham](#))

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