

Lawmakers don't need court sanctions to fund education, state says

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The state attorney general's office told the state Supreme Court Thursday that it doesn't need to resort to legal sanctions to compel the Legislature to comply with a court order to fully fund basic education.

Such actions would be "unfounded and unproductive," wrote David Stolier, a senior assistant attorney general, in a brief delivered Thursday to the state's highest court.

The attorney general's court filing comes a week after the plaintiffs in a landmark education-funding case asked the state Supreme Court to hold state lawmakers in contempt if they don't do more to boost education funding by the end of the year.

The state Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that the Legislature was neglecting its constitutional obligation to amply fund the state's school system, and ordered lawmakers to fully fund K-12 education in Washington by 2018.

The Supreme Court retained jurisdiction in that case, known as *McCleary vs. State*, to ensure the Legislature follows through with paying for education reforms it has already approved.

Lawmakers delivered a progress report to the court last month, but acknowledged they hadn't approved measures in 2014 to substantially increase education funding before the 2018 deadline.

The plaintiffs said last week that the Legislature's report didn't amount to the detailed long-term funding plan the court had requested.

"Washington schoolchildren therefore need this Court to enforce their constitutional right to an amply funded education – and to do so before it's too late for them," wrote Thomas Ahearne, an attorney for the group of parents, school districts and education advocacy groups that originally brought the lawsuit.

But Stolier wrote in the state's reply brief Thursday that "the Legislature continues to make progress toward meeting the 2018 deadline this Court established" and "is well aware of its constitutional duty."

Stolier argued the *McCleary* plaintiffs are asking for full compliance with the court order immediately, even though the court gave the Legislature until 2018.

The state also objected to the plaintiffs' references to former Alabama Gov. George Wallace, who fought against desegregation of Alabama schools during the civil rights era despite a court order.

"This is not Alabama in 1963 and Plaintiffs' continuing and repeated comparisons to segregationists is offensive and unproductive," the state's reply reads.

It's now the state Supreme Court's turn to weigh in on how well the Legislature is complying with its 2012 ruling. Its response could take several months.

Read more here: <http://www.thenewtribune.com/2014/05/29/3218110/lawmakers-dont-need-court-sanctions.html?sp=/99/296/#storylink=cpy>