

Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants Receive Class Action Status in VA Overtime Suit

A federal judge has certified a class action lawsuit involving nurse practitioners and physician assistants accusing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs of failing to pay overtime since 2006, according to a post on the site of **Androvett Legal Media and Marketing**.

Judge Elaine D. Kaplan of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims granted certification in an action brought by class representatives Stephanie Mercier, Audricia Brooks, Deborah Plageman, Jennifer Allred and Michele Gavin on behalf of nurse practitioners and physicians assistants at 85 different facilities across the country.

Provost Umphrey attorneys Michael Hamilton of the firm's Nashville office and Guy Fisher in the Beaumont, Texas, office are among the attorneys working on the lawsuit along with counsel David Cook and Clement Tsao of Cincinnati's Cook & Logothetis, LLC, Douglas Richards of Lexington, Kentucky and Robert Stropp of Washington DC's Mooney Green, P.C.

"These health care professionals dedicate their time for the well-being of our veterans, and by law, are entitled to overtime when they are required to work beyond their work schedules," said Hamilton. "We believe this lawsuit to be critical for veteran patient safety and health. To expect these employees to work extended hours without overtime pay is wrong. With the class certification, we can now proceed onto the next step in this lawsuit."

The lawsuit seeks compensation for employees who worked

overtime processing electronic and computer patient records using VA facility computers, VA laptops and sometimes personal computers, work that is critical to the medical treatment of patients. Nurse practitioners and physician assistants say the work is considered mandatory. Those who failed to complete the assignments were subject to disciplinary measures for poor time management.

"I'm grateful that the judge agreed with us and certified the lawsuit as a class action," said Cook. "It is wrong for any employer to expect people to work for free."

Hamilton and Cook estimate that as many 10,000 VA employees could be represented in the class action lawsuit, according to the Androvett post.

The case is *Stephanie Mercier, Audricia Brooks, Deborah Plageman, Jennifer Allred, Michele Gavin v. The United States of America*, No. 1:12-cv-00920 in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims.