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7 sue Nassau Health Care Corp. in bias case

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Seven African-Americans are suing the Nassau Health Care Corporation in federal court, charging racial discrimination and other illegal acts.

The six women and one man charge in U.S. District Court in Central Islip that some top administrators at the corporation "sought to deprive plaintiffs of employment, position, benefits, title and pay through a pattern of discrimination, retaliation, misrepresentation, misinformation, fraud, harassment, character assassination, abuse and manipulation of laws, rules and regulations."

The plaintiffs, through their Hempstead lawyer, Frederick Brewington, are seeking \$6 million each plus costs.

Sharon Popper, the corporation's general counsel, said, "It is corporate policy not to comment on pending legislation."

The plaintiffs include Cheryl Clarke of Freeport, who was hired as associate general counsel in March 2001, passed over for the top job in 2002 and fired in June 2005. Another is Doreen Whethers of Freeport, the investigative representative of the Office of Diversity, which handled in-house discrimination complaints. That office, created in July 1999, had much of its staff sent to other, lesser duties in the corporation, Brewington said. Its initial director has a separate federal lawsuit pending against the health care unit, he said.

"The problem for the brass was that the Office of Diversity staff was serious about their jobs, and were able to informally resolve many of the cases before they reached courts," said Brewington. "If the intent was to address issues of discrimination, the top administration should have welcomed this positive program with open arms. But they didn't."