

## *Workers allege retaliation for reporting discrimination*

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### **Body**

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Twenty black current and former employees of Bell Atlantic Corp. have filed a \$ 50 million lawsuit alleging the company retaliates against workers who report discrimination.

The suit, filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, charges the telecommunications company has harassed and denied promotions to employees who complained about discrimination on the job.

Employees involved in a 1996 discrimination suit against the company and those who have filed cases with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission are among the targets of retaliation, according to the suit.

"The plaintiffs file this suit to challenge and to bring to an end Bell Atlantic's practice of retaliation against individuals who protest Bell Atlantic's race discrimination and that company's unlawful retaliation," the lawsuit said.

Bell Atlantic spokeswoman Joan Rasmussen said the company had not seen the complaint. But she said the company has a strong record of keeping discrimination out of the workplace.

"At Bell Atlantic discrimination of any kind is completely unacceptable," Rasmussen said. "We take allegations of discrimination very seriously."

The \$ 500 million suit filed by 48 workers in 1996 alleges the company discriminates against black workers in job placement, training and promotions. Those claims still may be pursued by individual defendants after a judge denied them class action status, said John Hermina, lawyer for the plaintiffs.

Workers allege retaliation for reporting discrimination

The suit filed Tuesday lists a number of alleged acts of retaliation against employees who spoke out about discrimination. In one instance cited, a woman who had filed suit against Bell Atlantic for discrimination later pursued without success 125 job opportunities at the company.

Another worker was monitored by colleagues at both his job and his home after charging the company engaged in discriminatory acts, according to the suit.

Bell Atlantic provides local phone service to 13 states, including West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

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