

Ex-budget chief: West Chester U. hid millions from state

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West Chester University's former chief budgeting officer contends that the school falsely reported deficits or near break-even budgets for three years to get more state funding, then "squirreled away" millions of dollars in unreported funds to use if it succeeded in withdrawing from the State System of Higher Education.

In a federal lawsuit filed Thursday, Colleen Bradley said she was fired for speaking out about the university's "misuse and waste of public funds by high-level state government officers." Her 62-page complaint contends the university violated Pennsylvania's whistle-blower law and seeks damages.

Though the university claimed break-even or deficit budgets, it actually increased its assets by \$56.6 million over three years, the lawsuit alleges. Concealing the surpluses allegedly allowed the university to reap more than \$146 million in state funding. The university hid the funds in an account for facility maintenance, the lawsuit said.

In a statement, West Chester officials disputed the allegations.

"The university . . . vigorously denies Ms. Bradley's allegations and believes her legal claims to be without merit," said Pamela Sheridan, spokeswoman for West Chester, the largest university of 14 in the state system, which is also named as a defendant.

Bradley began work as director of budget and financial planning and chief budgeting officer in November 2011 at a salary of \$101,471. She was notified in October 2014 that her employment would be terminated in June, the lawsuit says. She is reportedly on medical leave.

The lawsuit contends that officials for the university and the state system unsuccessfully tried to coerce Bradley into presenting false budgets to the state, and use the unreported money if West Chester succeeded in a plan to withdraw from the state system. That secession plan has died.

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