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Students sue Virginia College for \$14 million

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JACKSON, MS (WLBT) - A Jackson attorney has filed a \$14 million dollar lawsuit against Virginia College on behalf of 14 nursing students. The students completed their courses, and graduated, only to find they couldn't get jobs because the private college's Licensed Practical Nursing program was not properly accredited with the State of Mississippi.

The attorneys claim Virginia College defrauded the students out of a lot of money knowing their nursing program had not received initial accreditation by the State Board of Community and Junior Colleges.

"They don't have a degree. They don't have the tuition and not able to sit for the licensure exam for the a program they initially entered Virginia College for," said Kenya Martin, who represents the students along with his brother. The 14 students graduated September 15, 2010.

The required licensure examination is required in order to get a good paying job as a licensed practical nurse LPN. The Martin brothers claim the students have nothing to show for \$25,000 dollars in tuition costs at the private college or these graduation diplomas.

Martin told me, "One day after they graduated, September 16, 2010, they told students the program has not been granted initial accreditation. That's exactly right. That's part of the plan which means they can't take the licensure test and they can't get a job until they take that test. The degree is not worth the paper it's printed on. That's what that means."

We obtained a copy of the Notice of Preliminary Accreditation signed by the students. It states the initial accreditation is required in order for graduates of the PN program to be eligible to take the examination for licensure as a practical nurse. Added to the bottom of the page, this notation for the student to sign off on: I certify that I have read and understand the requirements for accreditation described above. I acknowledge that Virginia College's PN program has not yet been granted initial accreditation by the SBCJC and that the college's failure to obtain such accreditation could jeopardize my ability to complete the PN program or to sit for the licensure examination.

One of the students sent a private email questioning the document September 21, 2010 just days after signing it.

Marcus Coleman wrote Melba Anderson, the Practical Nursing Program Director at Virginia College. "In your honest opinion, do you think I should have signed that paper concerning accreditation? I feel uneasy about it. I know that its already been done."

In response, Anderson emailed back, "I do not think you made a bad decision by signing the form. I think it was the best decision for all parties involved. I do not think it will hurt you in the end. I think your group will be fine." She also said, "The form is just a step in the process."

Attorneys say the students were tricked into signing it.

During a telephone interview Thursday, the attorney for the Birmingham corporation that owns Virginia College admitted the LPN program was not accredited. Roger Swartzwelder, general counsel said, "We're doing everything we can to address the State Board's concern. We hope then, the issues raised by the students will be addressed.

Swartzwelder says Virginia College is appealing the decision.

Attorney Warren Wright also claims that despite the lack of PN accreditation, Virginia College continues to accept nursing candidates into the program without telling them the truth.

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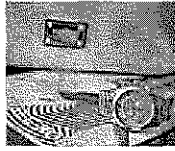
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