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Judge refuses to dismiss wage effort at immigration jail

TACOMA, Wash. (AP) — A federal judge has once again refused to dismiss a Washington state effort to force The GEO Group to pay detainees minimum wage for work performed at an immigration jail in Tacoma. U.S. District Judge Robert Bryan issued the ruling Monday, saying the for-profit private prison company had not shown that it was protected from such claims by virtue of being a federal government contractor. Bryan previously rejected GEO's arguments that Washington's minimum wage law is overridden by federal law prohibiting the employment of immigrants in the country illegally and that the lawsuit should be dismissed because it failed to name the federal government as a defendant. GEO pays detainees at its Northwest Detention Center \$1 per day to volunteer for tasks such as janitorial or kitchen work. Washington's minimum wage is \$11 per hour. Attorney General Bob Ferguson wants GEO to give up the profits it has made by relying on detainee labor over the past decade - potentially millions of dollars.