

O'Hare searches spur lawsuit

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Twenty-one African-American women alleged in a civil rights lawsuit Thursday that U.S. Customs officials at O'Hare Airport subjected them to abusive body searches.

The suit, filed in federal court, claims the women were targeted because they are black. All the women received at least a pat-down search, and most also were given strip searches and body cavity searches, according to the suit. The youngest was 13.

None of the searches, conducted in a small, windowless room at O'Hare's international terminal,

turned up drugs or other contraband, the suit says.

And none of the women was carrying an unusual amount of cash, showed evidence of drug use or appeared suspicious in other ways, it adds.

The suit, filed by attorney Edward M. Fox, is against five named customs agents and unknown and unnamed officials of the customs service and U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. None of the defendants could be reached for comment.

The women seek unspecified damages plus a court order to halt alleged discrimination against African-American women by targeting them for body searches.