

# Aspin sued on closing city defense facilities

A senator and five congressmen filed suit. They seek evidence the closures were rigged.

By Joseph A. Slobodzian  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter and five members of Congress yesterday sued Defense Secretary Les Aspin seeking a court order compelling defense officials to release all information used in deciding to recommend closing four facilities in the city.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court here, contends that Navy officials have refused to provide Specter's office with complete documentation of the closure recommendations, including an internal consolidation study that Specter's office obtained through other sources on March 26.

"It is believed that other information statutorily required to be made available to Congress is not being provided by the Secretary of Defense," the suit alleges.

It asks for a court order requiring the Defense Department to release all documents related to the recommended Philadelphia closings, including "all documents and materials that do not support the final recommendations."

The study, the suit says, concluded that the Naval Aviation Supply Office in Northeast Philadelphia should not be closed. That facility, under the recommendation, would merge with the Navy's Ships Parts Control Center at Mechanicsburg, Pa. Also recommended for closing are the Defense Personnel Support Center and Defense Clothing Factory in South Philadelphia and the Defense Industrial Supply Center in the Northeast.

The four facilities employ a total of about 8,500 people.

The suit maintains that the study is crucial to the federal Base Closure and Realignment Commission,

which will review Aspin's recommendations before making its recommendations to the President and Congress on July 1.

Defense Department officials did not respond to requests for comment.

In a statement, Specter said "numerous and persistent efforts to obtain information from the Department of Defense on its decision for closing, transferring or realigning the four affected Philadelphia facilities have been unsuccessful. The Department of Defense has ignored our requests."

Bruce W. Kauffman, who filed the suit for Specter and the Congress members, said they hope to avoid a repeat of the 1991 base closing process in which the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard was recommended for closure, where they learned only after the commission had made its recommendations that the Navy had withheld documents.

That revelation led Specter and 18 other political and union leaders to file suit in federal court here seeking to overturn the shipyard closure because the Navy allegedly rigged the process to ensure that the shipyard was on the closing list.

Joining Specter, a Philadelphia Republican, in filing the suit were U.S. Reps. Robert E. Andrews and William J. Hughes, South Jersey Democrats; Curt Weldon, a Delaware County Republican; James C. Greenwood, a Bucks County Republican, and Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky, a Montgomery County Democrat.

Spokesmen for Democratic U.S. Sen. Harris Wofford and U.S. Rep. Thomas M. Foglietta, of Philadelphia, both of whom were plaintiffs in the shipyard suit, said yesterday that they had decided not to join in the new lawsuit after consultation with Mayor Rendell.

Both said that Rendell believes it may be more effective to negotiate with the new Democratic administration in Washington than file another lawsuit.