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Health Care Employees

Workers in Three Units at Boston Hospital Choose Representation by Service Employees

BOSTON—In the first representation elections at a Massachusetts hospital chain since it agreed earlier this year not to oppose union organizing, workers at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston voted overwhelmingly for representation by a local of the Service Employees International Union.

In NLRB elections conducted April 7-8, employees in three units with more than 800 eligible employees voted nearly three to one in favor 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East.

The votes were 317-103 for the union in a unit of 566 service and maintenance workers, 75-40 in a unit of 154 technical employees, and 61-25 in a unit of 113 office clerical workers, according to Bob Redbord, an attorney for NLRB Region One.

Hospital chain Caritas Christi Health Care, owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, agreed in January to maintain a cooperative relationship with 1199 SEIU and to allow "free and fair elections" among all employees except doctors, nurses, and administrators (16 DLR A-8, 1/28/09).

A spokesman for the union, Jeff Hall, said that the local began collecting signatures at St. Elizabeth's immediately after the announcement, and that the hospital adhered to the neutrality pledge. Signature drives are under way at the other Caritas Christi hospitals in Boston, Brockton, Methuen, Norwood, and Fall River, Mass., but no elections have been scheduled, Hall said.

Workers at St. Elizabeth's will immediately "begin the internal process of forming bargaining committees and surveying workers," according to Hall, who said negotiations should begin "fairly soon."

A spokeswoman for St. Elizabeth's, Teresa Prego, said the hospital "has always maintained good relationships with labor unions over many years and anticipates we will continue to do so." Nurses and skilled workers have been unionized at St. Elizabeth's for many years, she said.

For the local, the organizing victory was the first breakthrough in the Boston area since it announced in September 2007 an ambitious plan to win representation for some 60,000 workers at area teaching hospitals (182 DLR A-4, 9/20/07).

By Rick Valliere