

Labor Arbitrator Penalizes Hospital

By KIM MARTINEAU | Courant Staff Writer
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NEW HAVEN - An independent arbitrator has ordered Yale-New Haven Hospital to pay \$4.5 million to the union trying to organize workers at the hospital as well as to employees who were set to vote in a secret ballot election last year.

SEIU called the union vote off last December after Yale-New Haven was cited for violating the terms of a fair election agreement crafted by both sides as a condition for the city's fast-track approval of a new cancer center. In a decision Tuesday, arbitrator Margaret Kern said the hospital ruined any chance for a fair election by intimidating union supporters and spreading misinformation.

She ordered the hospital to pay SEIU \$2.3 million, to cover its organizing expenses and \$2.2 million to about 1,700 hospital employees eligible to vote in the election. The second figure is the amount Yale-New Haven paid to IRI Consultants to Management Inc., the company it hired to coordinate its campaign against the union.

"Employees were deprived of the right to truthful information, the right to do their job uninterrupted by solicitation, and the right not to participate in captive audience meetings," wrote Kern.

The arbitrator gave Yale-New Haven the right to challenge the figures, an option the hospital may explore, spokesman Vin Petrini said. "We recognize we made mistakes throughout the campaign."

To repair the damage, SEIU had asked that Yale-New Haven be forced to recognize the union. A majority of the 1,700 employees set to vote in December had signed cards indicating they wanted a union. Kern stopped short of granting that request.

SEIU has no plans to pursue another election but is exploring other ideas, a union spokesman said.

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