



Unfair labor practice charges filed against CHS, parent company of The Memorial Hospital of Salem County

Published: Friday, June 11, 2010, 9:30 PM



Jaime Marine

MANNINGTON TWP. — Unfair labor practice charges have been filed with the National Labor Relations Board after an attorney for CHS, the parent company for The Memorial Hospital of Salem County, allegedly refused to allow a nurse to testify in a federal hearing concerning a union election for the nurses at the Mannington Township-based hospital, according to a release issued this past week by the HPAE.

The hearing was the result of more than 70 percent of the registered nurses at The Memorial Hospital of Salem County filing a petition for an election to join the state's largest nursing union, Health Professionals and Allied Employees. The petition for election was filed on May 19.

The HPAE claims that on June 7, an attorney for CHS allegedly told a registered nurse, called as a witness at the NLRB hearing, that she could not speak or testify because she was a supervisor.

A number of registered nurses, all of whom work at the hospital, had been testifying in hopes of winning the right to vote in a union election, according to HPAE officials. The union, HPAE, filed unfair labor practice charges after the incident, and asked for the hearings to continue with nurses as witnesses, according to the news release.

The corporate attorney for CHS claimed that a majority of the nurses are supervisors, and therefore ineligible to vote in a union election, and that some would be ineligible to even testify, according to the release.

Officials at the NLRB confirmed that the union had filed charges against CHS on June 7 and June 9. The charges are currently under investigation.

Hospital spokesman George Gennaoui said Friday that out of respect for their nurses and because these matters are currently pending before the National Labor Relations Board, The Memorial Hospital of Salem County would not be providing public comment at this time.

HPAE President Ann Twomey recently expressed her concerns over the incident, saying, "We hold very dear in this country the right to speak freely, to vote freely and certainly, in a court of law, to testify to our knowledge, to the facts, and to our beliefs.

"This blatant attempt by the for-profit CHS to rob nurses of their democratic and workplace rights should not stand. I would hope that the local board of The Memorial Hospital of Salem County, our elected officials and health officials would speak out on behalf of nurses and their rights. Whether you are for the union or not is immaterial. The right to speak for oneself and vote one's conscience is what is essential."

The hearing, which was interrupted as a result of the incident, was restarted the following day and testimony continued, according to the HPAE. The hearing wrapped up Thursday afternoon, according to HPAE. The NLRB allowed the testimony to go forward, despite objections from CHS' attorney.

There are 130 registered nurses working at the hospital, according to HPAE officials. HPAE represents 12,000 nurses and health professionals at hospitals, nursing homes and university settings throughout the state, including Cooper University Hospital, Virtua Memorial Hospital and South Jersey Healthcare.