



Union demonstrates outside White Plains Hospital Center

By Ben Rubin • bfrubin@lohud.com • June 25, 2010

WHITE PLAINS — In a small demonstration Thursday, representatives of a local union accused the White Plains Hospital Center administration of intimidating and harassing its employees to stop them from unionizing.

A hospital spokeswoman disputed those claims, saying the administration is against the union expanding but wasn't intimidating anyone.

The 1199SEIU, an East Coast health-care workers chapter of the Service Employees International Union, is trying to grow its ranks at the hospital and pushed forward a July 14 vote to allow 325 more employees to join the union. The organization already represents 175 workers at the 1,600-employee facility.

Several hospital workers and SEIU representatives handed out fliers grilling the hospital administration over its "anti-worker campaigns." Disagreements flared up several times between union representatives and a growing number of security guards stationed outside.

"We don't like the fear tactics that they're doing. You're scaring people into voting 'no.' Let them make their own decision," said Anthony Peterson, the lead organizer for the union effort.

Several unionized hospital employees were interviewed, but Peterson said nonunion employees were too intimidated to speak to the media.

Several SEIU representatives complained that the hospital had forced them to exit the facility and threatened to arrest them if they didn't leave.

Hospital spokeswoman Dawn French said the facility has been following all its legal requirements for the election.

"I am 100 percent positive that there have been no intimidation tactics used," she said Thursday.

French added that the hospital has required union representatives to leave when, she said, they came into the hospital on false pretenses during times they were not legally allowed to be there. The union is allowed entry at a specific place and time every week for meetings.

"We're under no legal requirement to allow them to conduct an election on hospital premises," French said.

She said the hospital hadn't laid off any workers in at least 40 years and that the administration has developed a strong family-like relationship with hospital workers. Senior leaders "don't want a union to get between that relationship," she said.