

[Preferences](#) | [Log Out](#)

The Boston Globe



Local Search Site Search

[HOME](#) [TODAY'S GLOBE](#) [NEWS](#) [BUSINESS](#) [SPORTS](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [A&E](#) [THINGS TO DO](#) [TRAVEL](#) [CARS](#) [JOBS](#) [REAL ESTATE](#) [LOCAL SEARCH](#)

[Local](#) [National](#) [World](#) [Campaign '08](#) [Business](#) [Education](#) [Health](#) [Science](#) [NECN](#) [Obituaries](#) [Special reports](#) [Traffic](#) [Weather](#)

HOME/NEWS/HEALTH NEWS - BOSTON GLOBE - HEALTH COLUMNS

Home health assistants vote to join union The Boston Globe

Overwhelming 'yes' gives momentum, strength to SEIU

By Jeffrey Krasner
Globe Staff / November 9, 2007

[Email](#) | [Print](#) | [Text size](#) - +

Thousands of home health assistants in Massachusetts overwhelmingly voted to join the powerful Service Employees International Union, giving the union strong momentum as it moves toward its larger goal of attempting to organize about 55,000 workers at Boston's teaching hospitals.

The vote comes at a time when union membership nationwide continues a decadeslong decline. SEIU has been able to buck that trend, partly by emphasizing ways to improve workers' career development, not just immediate improvements in wages and benefits, said Thomas A. Kochan, professor of management at the Sloan School of Management at MIT.

"This victory is a big boost and a basis for saying they're going to be a more significant player in the healthcare industry," Kochan said. "SEIU has a vision of being the preeminent healthcare union and seeing their members as people who should have opportunities to move up and develop their skills and capabilities."

Officials from 1199SEIU, which claims to be the largest union local in the world with more than 300,000 members, said the vote will help its hospital organizing efforts.

"SEIU Healthcare is growing all over the nation," said Dennis Rivera, chairman of the healthcare arm of the union. "With this win, we'll have more than 34,000 members in Massachusetts. That will be a boost to us to do the political and organizing work, and we'll have more resources."

After the voting results were made public yesterday, Mayor Thomas M. Menino reiterated his earlier support for the union's plan to organize teaching hospital workers.

"I'll always stand with SEIU because they fight for the people in our society who need somebody on their side - the personal care assistants, the janitors, the hotel workers," Menino said.

Paul Levy, chief executive of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, has said he doesn't believe the organizing effort will help the hospital provide better care or improve its research and teaching. Officials from other Boston hospitals have not commented publicly on SEIU's campaign.

A law passed last year - sponsored by state Senator Steven A. Tolman, Democrat of Brighton - enabled the healthcare workers to vote on union membership through a mail-in ballot.

About 22,000 ballots were mailed several weeks ago. The returned ballots included 6,135 votes to unionize and 135 opposing the move.

Jeff Hall, a spokesman for SEIU, said about 5,000 addresses may have been incorrect, partially accounting for the low vote total, but the percentage of returned ballots was still high, he said.

Home health assistants are hired by individual patients or family members, and provide such services as bathing, feeding, and cooking. They are paid directly by the state's Medicaid program, Mass Health.

Union officials said they are assembling a bargaining committee, which will set priorities for wage and benefit negotiations with the state. Current pay for the attendants is \$10.84 an hour with no healthcare benefits.

In organizing the home health assistants, SEIU focused on issues that transcended wages and benefits.

For example, it highlighted the growing need for healthcare attendants as the population ages, and the possibility that home care could help the state save money by keeping residents out of expensive nursing homes.

"It was the labor movement that recognized a social problem in our society," said

Advertisement

[Home](#) | [Today's Globe](#) | [News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [A&E](#) | [Things to Do](#) | [Travel](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Local Search](#)

[CONTACT BOSTON.COM](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Work here](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS feeds](#) | [Make Boston.com your homepage](#)

[CONTACT THE BOSTON GLOBE](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Manage your subscription](#) | [Advertise](#) | [The Boston Globe Extras](#) | [The Boston Globe Store](#) | © 2007 NY Times Co.

INSIDE BOSTON.COM

THINGS TO DO



[See the latest photos from Boston night scene](#)

BUSINESS



[A historical look at the nation's most famous strikes](#)

SPORTS



[Patriots: The road to 16-0](#)

NEWS



[Scenes from the Everett fire.](#)

PLUS...

[Blogs](#) | [Games](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Puzzles](#) | [Personals](#) | [Movie listings](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Globe Magazine](#)

MOST POPULAR

[E-MAILED](#) [SEARCHED](#)

- [1. Irish police bust beer bandits, continue hunt for missing Guinness](#)
- [2. Gift picks for your pet](#)
- [3. In style, out west](#)
- [4. Tenure at MIT still largely a male domain](#)