

# Hospitals - Dominican Hospital Dominican workers seek vote on unions

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SANTA CRUZ — Employees at Dominican Hospital are about to take a step toward forming a union.

A petition asking the National Labor Relations Board to conduct a union election at Dominican Hospital may be filed as early as Friday.

Officials from the International Union of Operating Engineers Local No. 3 in the past several months have collected authorization cards from at least 30 percent of the approximately 1,400 non-management Dominican workers.

Also this week, members of the California Nurses Association started a union drive of their own at Dominican — this one to organize only the registered nurses.

If the CNA succeeds in getting at least 30 percent of the approximately 400 registered nurses to sign authorization cards, it, too, will seek a union election from the NLRB.

At issue is whether the Dominican registered nurses would be better represented by their own bargaining unit, rather than being included in the Local No. 3 unit.

"The word dignity may cover it," said Merton Dushkes of Local No. 3 about the effort to authorize a union election.

"They want to feel ... they have a right to participate in negotiating what their conditions are."

Dushkes' union wants a complete bargaining unit that would represent all non-management employees. He said the request will be filed with the NLRB either Friday or Tuesday.

The NLRB is expected to conduct a hearing to determine what kind of bargaining unit or units are appropriate for Dominican.

"Clearly, there is an obvious distinction between these groups," said Maureen Anderson, a spokeswoman for the California Nurses Association. "Nurses have specific

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## Dominican unions

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issues that need to be addressed."

Last month, the Supreme Court upheld an NLRB regulation that allows eight separate bargaining units to be recognized in acute care hospitals.

One of those is for registered nurses.

Anderson said in light of that decision, it is unlikely the NLRB will even conduct a hearing once enough registered nurses sign cards asking for an election.

But Dushkes said the NLRB could conduct a hearing and decide that a wall-to-wall unit would be most appropriate for Dominican. If that were the case, he said, it is not likely the CNA would want to represent everyone.

Dushkes said, however, that if the NLRB allows a separate election for the registered nurses, the Local No. 3 could be on the ballot, too.

Roger Hite, chief operating officer for Dominican, would not comment on the union drives until a petition is filed with the NLRB.

"Right now, it's still in the rumor stage," said Hite earlier this month. "Ever since we consolidated the two ... hospitals (Dominican and Community) we have had unions looking at the opportunity because of the change."

Dushkes said Dominican employees came to him with hopes of unionization because the hospital was "cutting staffing tremendously. The workload is intolerable in

some of the units."

He said there is a hiring freeze but Hite said there is only a management order to scrutinize each position as it comes open to determine if it needs to be filled.

Dushkes said employees are also concerned with their workload and staffing levels as they are with the economic factors of salaries and benefits.

"People have to want to organize," said Dushkes about the six-month-long effort to get the sufficient number of authorization cards. "It took a long time to get people to turn out to the meetings ... The campaign was slowish."

Anderson said the CNA drive to sign up registered nurses could take as long as five months.

CNA has 26,000 members, and 80 percent of them are registered nurses who are represented at work by a CNA contract.

"Nurses feel more than ever before that they need to be represented," said Anderson, pointing to the staffing shortages and changing work environments that have struck the profession. "But we carefully pick the places that have the most interest."

When the NLRB calls for an election at Dominican, it will require a simple majority of the votes cast for a union to be formed and collective bargaining to begin.