

Home-Care Workers Arrested In Sit-In Protest

State Workers Urge Governor To Not Cut Service Hours

06/10/02

NBC 5

CHICAGO -- Seven people were reportedly arrested at the Thompson Center shortly before noon Monday while taking part in a sit-in to urge Gov. George Ryan not to cut the hours of home care workers.

About 40 home-care workers and disabled people gathered in the lobby of the Thompson Center demanding a written promise from Ryan not to cut service hours provided by state home-care workers.

Members of Service Employees International Union and several senior and disabled women gathered at the Thompson Center around 11 a.m.

The group held up signs that read, "Fighting for living wages," and shouted "We shall not be moved," as many sat on the floor in the lobby.

SEIU spokeswoman Cindy Boland said the union had not received any specific information that home-care service was to be among cuts Ryan was scheduled to call for during a special session of the General Assembly in Springfield Monday afternoon.

"We don't want home-care to be among the cuts," she said.

After the arrests, the remainder of the group moved their rally outside the building.

At the Thompson Center, Chicago police officers and Central Management Services officers, who provide security for state-run buildings, declined to comment on the arrests.

A CMS deputy chief, who declined to give his name, referred all questions about the arrests to CMS public information officer Judy Parsonet, who was not immediately available for comment.

A desk sergeant at the Central District police station said during a phone interview that those arrested were just arriving at the station around 12:15 p.m. and the paperwork on the arrests was not ready yet. The sergeant would not comment further on the arrests.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), who attended the demonstration to show her support, said after the arrests, "I don't understand this."

Schakowsky said that the majority of the people who work as home-care workers are older, minority women. Full-time home-care workers earn between \$11,000 and \$14,000 a year, according to SEIU Local 880 President Helen Miller.

"We just can't live on that little bit of money," home-care worker Odessa White, 74, said in a written release from SEIU. "If hours are cut, that will mean even less and seniors don't have enough hours already."

SEIU spokesman Cory Muldoon said White was one of the seven people arrested.

Miller said that if the workers' hours are cut, many seniors and disabled people won't get enough care at home and may have to be moved to nursing homes.

Schakowsky and Miller said home-care workers represented by SEIU Local 880 already had an annual \$1 an hour pay increase slated for 2003 cut from the state budget, but the union was not

asking for the raise to be reinstated.

"They're only asking that their hours not be cut," Schakowsky said. She said the home-care workers work full-time providing care to elderly and disabled people, sometimes changing diapers or bathing disabled people.

"Their reward is to be dragged off to jail," she added.

A representative of Ryan's Chicago press office referred all questions to spokeswoman Wanda Taylor, who was not immediately available for comment.