

Obama, Durbin Press Resurrection to Start Talks with Union

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Nearly a dozen members of Illinois' congressional delegation are urging Resurrection Health Care to "initiate a dialogue" with employees who want to form a union at Chicago's largest Catholic hospital system.

A letter sent to Resurrection CEO Joseph Toomey on Monday presses him to start talks with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the union that has been seeking to organize Resurrection workers for more than three years.

"We urge you to initiate a dialogue with your employees and AFSCME Council 31 to create an environment at all Resurrection hospitals that truly respects employees' right to organize," the letter says. It was signed by U.S. Sens. Barack Obama and Richard Durbin and U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky, Melissa Bean, Jerry Costello, Danny Davis, Rahm Emanuel, Luis Gutierrez, Jesse Jackson Jr., Daniel Lipinski and Bobby Rush, all Democrats.

"We are not going to engage in a dialogue with a union that hasn't been elected by our employees to represent them," Resurrection spokesman Brian Crawford said. He said a prompt response will be sent to the lawmakers, but declined further comment until after the letters are sent.

AFSCME spokesman Ramsin Canon said Resurrection officials have created "a climate of fear" to dissuade workers from campaigning for a union. He said AFSCME wants to sit down with Resurrection officials to discuss a fair path toward an election.

"They have patently refused to engage in any kind of constructive communication with employees on the organizing committee," Mr. Canon says.

Mr. Crawford says Resurrection "doesn't engage in union busting of any kind." He added that workers have a right to organize under the National Labor Relations Act.

In their letter, the lawmakers say current labor laws are too weak to ensure a fair process regarding union representation.

"All too often, the process opens the door to aggressive campaigns of interference with workers' organizing efforts," the letter says.

AFSCME has waged a public campaign against Resurrection in recent years, claiming the health system doesn't provide enough charity care and assailing its efforts to collect unpaid bills from poor people.