

WA Home Care Workers Say "No More Pay Freezes"

Local News

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Posted on : June 28, 2010 at 5:36 am

FEDERAL WAY, Wash. - After two months of bargaining, home-care workers and the State of Washington are no closer to a new contract agreement. Members of SEIU Local 775 provide in-home services to elderly, low-income Washingtonians and people with disabilities. The workers say their wages have been frozen for two years, and the state is now asking them to pay more for health insurance.

Karen Washington, Spokane, a home-care worker, is on the bargaining team. She says she makes just over \$10 an hour - and it's not enough to support a family.

"We're once again getting closer and closer to being minimum-wage workers. Meanwhile, we do very extensive care, and we save the state a lot of money because we can keep people in their homes rather than in facilities."

SEIU represents 38,000 home-care workers. Washington points out that many of them would qualify for the same assistance programs that their low-income clients receive. So far, she says, the mood at the bargaining table has been tense.

"We feel like we've let them balance the budget of the state on our backs quite long enough. That's where the mood is with the workers, and I know that they feel it on the other side of the table. It's not hostile in any way, but they know we're serious."

The two sides will be at the bargaining table again on July 6. State negotiators said they wanted to wait until a new revenue forecast came out mid-June to make their next offer. That forecast shows tax collections are down from previous predictions in February.