

Care workers get raises, benefits

Contract covers nearly 25,000 personal care attendants in Mass.

By **JON CHESTO**
THE PATRIOT LEDGER

BOSTON – Thousands of personal care attendants in the state will finally get health insurance and paid time off included in their compensation as part of a new union contract.

Mike Fadel, an executive vice president at the Service Employees International Union District 1199's Boston office, said nearly 25,000 personal care attendants will be covered under the contract. Fadel said the contract will cover about 2,900 workers in an area south of Boston that includes Quincy, Brockton and Plymouth.

The personal care attendants voted last year to join the union, and representatives from the union and the state PCA Workforce Council reached a tentative agreement on their first contract last month, Fadel said. The union collected votes to ratify the contract until 5 p.m. on Monday.

The three-year contract, which is retroactive to July 1, will increase personal care attendants' pay from its current level of \$10.84 an hour to \$12.48 an hour in the contract's final year. The contract also allows for a certain amount of paid time off as well as health insurance starting in mid-2009 – benefits that were not previously available to the personal care attendants.

"It was a long time coming," said Terri Morris, a personal care attendant who works with a quadriplegic person in Middleboro. "The fact there is a contract as well as a pay raise is very reassuring. The fact there's eventually going to be health insurance is a bonus, as well as paid time off."

Personal care attendants in the state are typically paid with funds from the state's Medicaid program. However, they work directly for their clients, usually someone with severe disabilities or an elderly person.

Jennifer Kritz, a spokeswoman for the state Executive Office of Health and Human Services, said Gov. Deval Patrick's administration recognizes the key role that personal care attendants play in caring for seniors and people with disabilities. Kritz said the Patrick administration also has been committed to helping the personal care attendants unionize.

Fadel said he hopes the contract will help provide some stability for clients by reducing the turnover in the work force. "This is a tremendous step forward in terms of stabilizing the home care program in the state and making this a much more viable option for people with disabilities and seniors who need the program," Fadel said.

Jon Chesto may be reached at jchesto@ledger.com.

