

RI home-based childcare workers vote overwhelmingly to unionize ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Home-based child-care providers in Rhode Island have voted overwhelmingly to unionize, giving them the ability to negotiate with the state over reimbursement rates and benefits.

After four days of voting that began Saturday, the child-care providers voted 390 to 19 to join the Service Employees International Union. (A total of 539 providers were eligible to cast ballots.) The votes were counted Thursday morning at the State Labor Relations Board office in Cranston.

The vote culminates a long effort by the union to represent the providers. The General Assembly passed legislation in its last session, later signed into law by Governor Chafee, allowing the providers to unionize and requiring the state to negotiate with them.

SEIU District 1199 filed a petition with the labor board for the right to bargain on their behalf with the Department of Administration over "reimbursement rates and other economic matters," including benefits.

The new law does not grant state-employee status on the home-based workers, and it specifically removes them from eligibility for a state pension. But it provides them with bargaining rights previously reserved for state employees - such as mediation and, if that doesn't work, arbitration.

Subsidized childcare is available in Rhode Island for children younger than 13 in families with incomes below 180 percent of the federal poverty level. That poverty level stands at \$23,550 for a family of four, which would place the income limit for subsidized childcare at \$42,390.

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