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Health care workers rally for union rights

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BOSTON. Health care workers will rally in the Longwood Medical area today for the right to “free and fair” elections to join unions.

According to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199, which is organizing the event, about 50,000 health care workers at Boston’s

teaching hospitals are eligible to unionize. Union officials claim that all hospital workers deserve the same benefits their colleagues in other positions receive, adding that institutions have used intimidation tactics to convince some workers not to join unions.

“There’s a growing consensus that this has to be done,” said Mike Fadel, union executive vice president.

In a statement, Jerry

Berger, spokesman for Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, said, “We certainly respect everyone’s constitutional right to free speech and assembly. Our efforts are focused on doing everything possible to ensure our patients and staff are not inconvenienced by the traffic.”

In October, the union’s campaign kick-off drew celebrity star power with local roots, as actor/director

Ben Affleck showed his support. Now, the Dropkick Murphys have also joined the cause. The band will perform at today’s rally.

Band member Ken Casey said his grandfather was a union organizer and that the group has been sympathetic to labor issues.

“There’s the severe irony that people who help us get health care can’t afford health care themselves,” Casey said.