

Talks with state workers snagged

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ALBANY — Negotiations broke off yesterday between the state and the union representing 45,000 state employees in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services Unit.

The Public Employees Federation, which earlier this year won negotiating rights for the employees, said it would ask the Public Employee Relations Board to assign an impartial arbitrator. The employees, including nurses, physicians, engineers, accountants and laboratory scientists, have been working without a contract since April 1.

About 700 workers at the South Beach Psychiatric Center, Ocean Breeze, as well as the Staten Island Developmental Center, and Institute for Basic Research, both in Willowbrook, are represented by the federation.

"There's just been a lack of communication," said Christine Grosse, a union spokeswoman. "We're hoping a mediator will help."

Meyer (Sandy) Frucher, director of the Governor's Office of Employees Relations, said the state offered a two-year agreement with a wage settlement comparable to that accepted by other state employees. Both the Civil Service Employees Association, representing 100,000 state workers, and the state prison guards union agreed to a 7 percent wage increase in the first year of the contract, with a bonus for top workers. Raises of between 3.5 percent and 7 percent next year, depending on the inflation rate, are called for in the contract's second year.

"They seem to think that we can give them a bigger settlement than the other unions and beyond what we've included in the state fiscal plan," Frucher said.

"And of course we can't."

The prison guards, represented by Council 82 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, struck for 16 days in April before reaching a settlement. Both state and federation officials predict they can reach a settlement without a walkout.