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Officials at Northern Michigan Hospital say the Teamsters' withdrawal of challenges related to a union representation election signals the end of a nearly 4-year-old strike by nurses.

"The Teamsters are no longer the representative of the nurses at the Northern Michigan Hospital," Barbara Allen, a spokeswoman for the hospital, told the Petoskey News-Review for a Friday story.

Teamsters Local 406 attorney Ted Iorio said the union encountered obstacles arranging a hearing on its complaint before the National Labor Relations Board. The Teamsters decided it would be quicker to withdraw the objections and allow nurses who favor union representation to petition for a new election, he said.

"To say that the strike is over, that's pure fantasy on their part," he told the Traverse City Record-Eagle. "They don't decide whether the strike is over or not."

Hospital officials stopped recognizing the union as the nurses' bargaining agent in December 2004, saying they had received a petition signed by a majority of nurses who said they no longer wanted to be union members. The Teamsters had contested the way the signatures were collected.

The Petoskey hospital hired temporary replacements after about half of its 470 nurses walked out on Nov. 14, 2002. Allen said more than half the strikers have since returned to work.

The union has said it's the nation's longest strike by nurses.

On the Net:

Teamsters Local 406: <http://www.mash406nmhnurses.com>

Northern Michigan Hospital: <http://www.northernhealth.org>

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