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PRESS RELEASE

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EEOC CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT HEARING 3/20/07

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is being summoned by Congress for its first oversight hearing since 2004. Since 2004, EEOC has seen its staffing depleted, with a resulting downturn in its ability to effectively enforce civil rights laws, which guard against discrimination in the workplace. Also, 2004 was the year EEOC decided to pilot an outsourced call center, where instead of Federal investigators, script reading contract operators answer calls from the public. Most recently, in January 2006, EEOC moved forward with its controversial field restructuring, which downgraded twelve field offices, many in areas with high minority populations.

According to Gabrielle Martin, President of the National Council of EEOC Locals, No. 216, which represents EEOC's employees, "A dose of strict oversight is just the medicine EEOC needs right now. EEOC has wasted three years and millions of dollars on downsizing and privatizing schemes, which have created exploding backlogs and hurt customer service. Oversight is needed to refocus EEOC's attention on ensuring that workers can realize the American dream by not suffering discrimination on the job."

Based on the administration's 2008 budget request, EEOC faces its fourth year of level funding. Staffing is down at the EEOC from 2,924 to 2,250, since a hiring freeze began in 2001, i.e., a 23% slashing of the workforce. At a recent briefing, EEOC Chair Naomi Earp informed stakeholders that EEOC will face a backlog of over 100,000 cases by 2010, assuming no new resources are forthcoming. While Earp voted July 2006 against the call center, because of its poor record and limited EEOC funding, she now appears to support making it a permanent seven figure yearly expense for the agency.

Martin states, "EEOC's leadership needs to make the case to Congress for a commitment of staff and resources that matches this country's commitment to civil rights. EEOC must also make a commitment to wisely spend its limited funding. EEOC should stop wasting millions on a contract call center, when the agency's own staff can do a better job of answering the public's calls and for a fraction of the price."

"We are hoping that the oversight panel asks Chair Earp some tough questions about whether she has a plan to reduce the backlog and why the EEOC should not end the contract with the call center, which was the subject of a critical report by the Inspector General," states Martin. EEOC's oversight hearing will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday March 20, 2007, H-309 Capitol, before the Commerce, Justice and State Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations.