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PRESS RELEASE

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UNION HOPEFUL EEOC NOMINATION HEARING MEANS HELP IS ON THE WAY

Today all eyes are on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as the Senate holds a hearing on the nominees the President has put forward to lead the small civil rights agency. According to Gabrielle Martin, President of the National Council of EEOC Locals, No. 216, AFGE/AFL-CIO, the union representing employees at the EEOC, "Employees are hopeful that permanent leadership will restore the EEOC's commitment to its civil rights mission."

Martin states, "During the past eight years, the agency has been starved of the resources necessary to enforce this nation's laws barring workplace discrimination." From 2001 to 2008, EEOC lost 25% of its workforce to a multi-year hiring freeze caused by several years of level funding. According to EEOC's 2009 report card, just released on November 16, 2009, the agency's case backlog has ballooned to 85,768, which is double what the agency had previously claimed was a "manageable level." The agency report concedes the backlog can be explained in part due to the loss of "a total of 271 front line investigators—more than 33 percent of its total investigative workforce."

Martin explains, "A train wreck was imminent," when staffing hit a record low in FY07, then a record high number of charges of discrimination was filed with the agency in FY08. According to the recent report card, the number of charges in 2009 was the second highest in the past 20 years. Even with a spate of new hires, mostly at the end of FY09, the EEOC's total staff hovers just above 2,300 employees. More work distributed to fewer EEOC investigators and support staff means employees, job applicants and employers wait longer for resolution of discrimination complaints. "It now takes on average over 9 months to process a charge of discrimination. So, for instance, a pregnancy discrimination claim can't even be resolved before the baby is born," comments Martin.

What does the Union hope to see in new permanent leadership at the EEOC? Martin reflects, "The last administration wasted time and money on a failed outsourced call center and on slicing and dicing EEOC's office jurisdictions to the public's detriment. It's time to get back to the basics- hire enough front line staff to do the job, give them the tools they need to do the job, and flatten the agency to a 10 to 1 employee to supervisor ratio."

Labor management relations also suffered under the leadership of the last two permanent EEOC Chairs. The situation is exacerbated by an outstanding arbitration decision against the EEOC, which found the agency committed overtime violations against its own staff. Martin readily extends an olive branch to the new team, "I look forward to meeting with the new Chair to discuss how we work together to improve working conditions for all Americans, including employees in our own agency."

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