

EEOC Considers New Wave of Furloughs

By Eric Katz

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Employees at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission may face a new round of furloughs, and the union that represents them is pushing back.

EEOC has already implemented its first phase of furloughs because of sequestration budget cuts, requiring employees to take five days of unpaid leave. The agency, which employs about 2,200 workers, is now assessing whether it needs to institute a second round.

In an effort to head off additional furloughs, the American Federation of Government Employees has asked its members to write to EEOC Chair Jacqueline Berrien to “share their personal stories of the harmful effects of furloughs on their work and finances.”

“EEOC is facing a full court press as it deliberates more furloughs,” Gabrielle Martin, president of an AFGE union local that represents EEOC workers, said in a statement. “Nobody but EEOC thinks furloughs are a good idea. Workers facing discrimination on the job want EEOC frontline staff at their desks to help. EEOC’s own employees are suffering from the lost pay and shortened time to do the same work.”

Martin added more than 70,000 cases were in EEOC’s backlog prior to the first round of furloughs at the agency. This backlog, as well as discrimination charge processing time, will continue to grow if the agency moves forward with more furloughs, Martin warned.

AFGE supports reducing management travel, cutting district budgets 5 percent, canceling certain conferences and discontinuing some service contracts to reach sequestration budget levels.

“Discrimination doesn’t go on furlough and neither should EEOC,” Martin said.

The EEOC said it will take the period from July 1 through July 12 to assess the savings from the first phase of furloughs to determine the necessity of a second phase. To accommodate this process, the agency has delayed any potential furloughs until after July.

“We understand that the furloughs caused by the sequester have been difficult for EEOC employees and their families, and will continue to do our utmost to avoid further furloughs,” EEOC Chief Operating Officer Claudia Withers told *Government Executive*.

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