

Congressional Report

BILLS, HEARINGS AND OTHER NEWS FROM CAPITOL HILL

Senate staff directs EEOC to hire more investigators

Senate budget writers have rejected the Bush administration's proposal to cut \$4 million from the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's** budget, but their decision is hardly a vote of confidence.

Saying they are concerned EEOC isn't doing enough to curb a rising backlog of discrimination cases, they direct the civil rights agency to hire additional field investigators and attorneys and reduce staffing at headquarters. EEOC projects employee complaints from the public and private sectors will grow from almost 34,000 in fiscal 2005 to nearly 48,000 in fiscal 2007.

EEOC would receive \$327 million in fis-

cal 2007, the same as this year, under the budget approved July 13 by the Senate Appropriations Committee. The House agreed to the president's request and approved a \$323 million budget for EEOC on June 29.

The additional money provided by the committee "will result in an increase in resources to the field, where the vast majority of the agency's work gets done, while reducing funding for staffing at headquarters," the committee said.

In an unusual move, the committee made line-item appropriations to specific headquarters offices, bucking the usual practice of appropriating a single amount for EEOC salaries and expenses. Such a move was

necessary "given the lack of respect shown for congressional priorities and the inability of the EEOC to submit detailed budget plans," appropriators said.

EEOC has riled some lawmakers and employee representatives by restructuring its field operations, which resulted in downgrading a third of the agency's district offices, and opening a call center staffed with contract employees to answer phone calls from the public.

The bill approved by the Senate committee would restore the Baltimore office to a district office and require that the agency's inspector general review what impact the restructuring has had on the agency's op-

erations. The committee also recommended ending the call center, in light of a June 29 report from the IG that concluded the center was ineffective.

The same day the committee approved the spending bill, EEOC's five members voted 3-2 to extend the contract on the call center for another year. The National Academy of Public Administration, which had recommended creating the center in an earlier study, will evaluate the center's effectiveness during the coming year, EEOC said.

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