

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EEOC LOCALS No 216, AFGE, AFL-CIO
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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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EEOC INSTRUCTS PUBLIC: HANG UP, DON'T LEAVE A MESSAGE, *CLICK*

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is implementing its plan to cut the public off from talking to Federal Investigators and other staff in its local offices. When calling a local EEOC office, the public will reach a recording that forces them to hang up and dial an outsourced 1-800 call center. The local offices are prevented from taking a message. Those who reach the call center must listen to recordings and respond to prompts if they wish to eventually speak to a scripted telemarketer, with one week of training in EEOC's laws.

According to Gabrielle Martin, President of the National Council of EEOC Locals, No. 216, the EEOC's employees' union, "This is a desperate bid to pad the number of calls the call center receives, so the agency can justify the pilot's existence and lay the background to have the call center take charges."

EEOC's action represents an about face from its commitments in 2004, when it first pedaled the privatized call center pilot, that it would not cut off offices from the public. Martin states, "Seeking help about workplace discrimination is not the same as verifying your cable bill. Those who don't want to speak with a telemarketer should not be cut off from calling their local EEOC office or have to wait until the call center takes a message in order to talk to EEOC staff."

EEOC also said in 2004 that it would not allow call center telemarketers to process charges of discrimination. However, EEOC is now planning to increase the role of telemarketers, who will now be "prescreening" individuals who wish to file a charge of discrimination, mailing them an extensive intake form, and since the public cannot call the offices, will end up assisting them with any questions in filling out the form.

The EEOC's Inspector General already issued a scathing report about the call center's poor performance during its initial two year pilot, including the inability to capture and transmit accurate caller information. Martin says, "It is a disservice for the EEOC to force the public to speak to someone who not only can't provide help, and who for the past two years, have not been able to take a good message."

The outsourced call center contract costs the cash strapped agency \$2.5 annually. In the mean time, EEOC allowed two of its district offices to go without phone service for months. "EEOC's actions make clear where they place their priorities. Rather than providing meaningful assistance to the public in offices near them, the EEOC insists on tying its limited funding and the trust of the public to a stone that lies sunken at the bottom of a lake."

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