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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 22, 2008

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EEOC EMPLOYEES' UNION SAYS: STOP SHORTCHANGING CIVIL RIGHTS' BUDGET

This week, as the nation celebrates the Martin Luther King Holiday, the union representing the employees at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) calls for relief from four years of stagnant funding for civil rights enforcement. The EEOC's leadership will soon meet with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to get approval for its 2009 Congressional budget request. Gabrielle Martin, President of the National Council of EEOC Locals, No. 216, is imploring EEOC Chair Naomi Earp to "tell it like it is" when she seeks next year's budget.

"EEOC has sky-high backlogs, because we only have a skeleton crew left working after years of hiring freezes. Backlogs mean that workers are forced to wait for justice when they face discrimination on the job," Martin says. In a bizarre move, for 2007 EEOC asked for a \$4 million budget cut. Senator Barbara Mikulski led the effort to save EEOC from that cut. Despite the continuing backlog and staffing crisis, for 2008 EEOC asked Congress for only level funding. While the House was prepared to increase the agency's budget by \$5 million and the Senate by \$50 million, the EEOC's lowball request for 2008 undermined these attempts. "Chair Earp may think that she earns high marks when she doesn't ask the administration for adequate resources, but America's workers are the ones who suffer from EEOC's failing performance."

According to Martin, "Chair Earp must paint an accurate picture of EEOC's 2007 failing report card, in order to get the budget increase needed to correct course." In fiscal year 2007, workers filed almost 83,000 charges of discrimination, which is up from 2006. However, the number of cases EEOC resolved dropped from the previous year. The resulting backlog of 54,970 cases is EEOC's highest backlog since at least 1998. The average time EEOC takes to process a case also increased. Meanwhile, a multi-year hiring freeze has cost EEOC one quarter of its workforce, down from 2,924 employees in 2002 to 2,158 employees in 2007.

Martin states, "The number one reason EEOC can't keep up with the work is because we don't have the bodies we need to get it done. To turn things around, EEOC must replenish frontline staffing." EEOC's own Inspector General acknowledged in its most recent report to Congress that, "The Agency is challenged in accomplishing its mission of promoting equality of opportunity in the workforce and enforcing Federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination due to a reduced workforce and an increasing backlog of pending cases."

Martin sums up the situation: "You can't achieve the American dream if you can't get a job or equal pay, because you're Black, a senior citizen, a woman, or you have a disability. You just can't enforce civil rights on the cheap. To ensure an equal playing field, EEOC must request a budget increase for 2009, along the lines of the \$50 million recommended by the Senate, and OMB should approve it."