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## **CCH® HR MANAGEMENT - 4/10/08**

### **Union asks: Can EEOC keep up with increased demand?**

Gabrielle Martin, President of the National Council of EEOC Locals, No. 216, which represents the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) employees, is not impressed with the agency's fiscal year (FY) 2007 enforcement and litigation data. "The bottom line is that the agency's workload is up—way up—but the EEOC's shrinking workforce can't keep up," she said in a March 11, 2008 statement. "This means the public is waiting longer for help."

**More work with less staff.** The union claims that while the number of charges of discrimination filed in 2007 jumped to the highest level since 2002, the number of EEOC employees is at a record low. "The EEOC has lost one quarter of its workforce since 2002, ending its year with a paltry 2,158 employees nationwide," according to the union. "EEOC's Fiscal Year 2007 report card demonstrates that more work is coming in the door, but less work is going out, because there are fewer employees available to do that work," Martin said.

The year-end figures show the delays faced by the public once a charge of discrimination is filed with the EEOC, according to the union, including:

- A backlog of 54,970 private sector cases in FY 2007—up 38 percent in one year;
- Resolution of only 72,442 cases in FY 2007, compared to 95,222 in FY 2002; and
- An average case processing time of 199 days in FY 2007.

Martin endorses the much needed staffing increase of an additional 177 employees slated in the EEOC's FY 2009 budget request, but warns: "First, EEOC must actually hire the allotted staff. Right now, EEOC is sitting on 200 positions that it is authorized to fill for 2008, but hasn't. Second, the staff must assign new hires to frontline positions, which serve the public, like investigators and support staff. If EEOC does not prioritize getting this staff on board, then EEOC is promising the public, another year of failing customer service for 2008."

**The EEOC responds: Making the best of its resources.** But the EEOC sees things a little differently. "The Commission is doing the best it can in tough times with the resources we have available," an EEOC spokesperson told CCH. "Through field repositioning, we have moved more staff to frontline positions and are in the process of filling other field positions where needed—such as staffing the new in-house customer response system that will replace the National Contact Center," he pointed out.

The EEOC “is striking an appropriate balance between outreach, education and technical assistance on one hand—to promote voluntary compliance by employers—and vigorous enforcement and litigation on the other hand—to process the growing caseload,” the agency’s spokesperson advised.