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Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Charge Data System

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Before the Special Committee on Aging, United States Senate



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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to your request for testimony on the status of our recently begun review of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Charge Data System. In your May 9, 1988, letter to the Comptroller General, you requested that we determine whether EEOC's system is able to provide accurate, reliable, complete, and current data to EEOC in its administration and enforcement of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

The Charge Data System is an automated system composed of field office data bases and a national data base. According to EEOC, the system was designed to provide EEOC's managers and staff with information on the status of employment discrimination charges.

As you know, we are in the very early stages of our work. Since the beginning of June 1988, we have met with some EEOC officials and reviewed some documentation to obtain a basic understanding of the system and how it operates. Much of the information we have reviewed thus far was gathered by the Committee staff during their examination of EEOC's files.

More work and analysis must be performed before we can determine whether EEOC's Charge Data System is accurate, reliable, complete, and current. Some of that work will

entail looking into how the Charge Data System was developed and implemented and the extent to which EEOC has tested the accuracy and reliability of data in the system.

Our preliminary review of documents thus far shows that some EEOC officials have expressed concerns over perceived problems in the way the Charge Data System supports their operations. The documents we have read were originated by seven of the 23 district offices, apparently to describe the perceived problems to the EEOC headquarters. Most of these concerns appear to focus on difficulties that have been encountered with the system since its implementation in 1986.

The problems reported in the documents concern unfulfilled user requirements and operational difficulties with the system. I will briefly discuss each of these reported concerns.

#### REPORTS OF UNFULFILLED USER REQUIREMENTS

In their documents, four EEOC district offices reported that user requirements were not being satisfied by the system. These requirements concern the ability to transfer automated records directly from one field office to another and the ability of district offices to directly access the data of their subsidiary offices.

### Automated Transfer of Records

The ability to transfer charge records from one field office to another was described by EEOC's Director of the Office of Program Operations as a critical requirement identified by the system users. According to the documents we reviewed, field offices transfer hundreds of charges each day to one another for such reasons as balancing workloads among offices and assigning cases to offices with proper jurisdiction.

Memorandums from three District Directors indicate that the Charge Data System is not able to directly transfer automated charge records from one field office to another. According to these officials, the sending field office must transfer the automated records to a system at EEOC headquarters, which is called a collection manager. The collection manager forwards the records to the national data base for updating. Then, the Charge Data System sends the automated records to the receiving office. The Director, Information Systems Services, said the process of transferring automated records this way can take 2 weeks and requires both the sending and receiving offices to maintain manual records in order to keep complete and current information on their workloads. The District Directors suggested that the Charge Data System be modified to provide

the capability for direct transfer of records from one field office to another.

#### Access To Subsidiary Office's Data

The ability of district offices to access the data of their subsidiary offices was also one of the critical requirements identified by the users, according to the Director, Office of Program Operations. Memorandums from three District Directors reported that the Charge Data System did not provide this capability; two said this capability was needed to monitor the quality and quantity of their subsidiary offices' work. According to one of the memorandums, the districts have to request automated reports on their subsidiary offices' operations from the National Data Base.

I would like to note that headquarters officials recently told us that they have been working to develop the capability for district offices to obtain automated information on the workload of their subordinate offices.

#### REPORTS OF OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

Documents from four district offices indicated that data inaccuracies were also a problem. These documents identified coding problems as one source of data inaccuracies. There are 129 action codes contained in the system which, according to one District Director, is

excessive, unwarranted, and unnecessarily creates delays and problems for the user. Additionally, another District Director said codes have not been developed to reflect such critical information as the transfer of open charges and cases closed because of the inability of EEOC to locate the charging party. Therefore, the system cannot compile accurate reports, and manual records must be maintained and reconciled with computer listings.

One District Director also reported that the Charge Data System is unable to list local data in the system, to delete errors and misinformation, to generate ad hoc reports, or to selectively print out charge data. He concluded that these inabilities result from the selection of improper software for the system. The same District Director also expressed concern that the Charge Data System still contains erroneous data that came from the predecessor system.

In summary, before we can determine whether EEOC's system is able to provide accurate, reliable, complete, and current data, more work needs to be done. The correspondence we reviewed contain indications of difficulties with the Charge Data System that warrant some further review. During the course of our work to respond to your request, we will look into the reported difficulties with the Charge Data System.

This concludes my prepared statement, Mr. Chairman. I will be pleased to answer any questions that you or others may have at this time.