

EEOC to Advance Federal Employment of People with Disabilities

Washington – July 11, 2013 – The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law applauds the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for advancing federal employment of people with disabilities by committing to provide a more detailed framework for federal agencies to “give full consideration to the hiring, placement and advancement of qualified individuals with disabilities.”

The Commission published its semi-annual **regulatory agenda** this week, indicating that it plans to issue new proposed regulations implementing Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act. Section 501 prohibits federal employers from discriminating based on disability and requires them to be “model employers” and take affirmative action to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

The Commission’s regulatory agenda states that the proposed rules may include goals consistent with a 2010 Executive Order requiring the federal government to hire 100,000 people with disabilities over five years. The agenda also indicates a particular focus on the employment of individuals with “targeted disabilities” – those disabilities that typically have resulted in the greatest exclusion from the workplace.

“We are very pleased to see that the Commission plans to update its rules to provide more guidance to federal agencies on steps that they must take to increase the employment of people with disabilities,” said Jennifer Mathis, director of programs at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law. “Having specific, meaningful goals is a key step to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities,” Mathis added. Currently, the employment rate of people with disabilities across the country is a mere 17%, compared with 63% for people without disabilities.

“We welcome the Commission’s particular interest in individuals with targeted disabilities,” stated Mathis. Employment rates for people with significant psychiatric disabilities, for example, have been extraordinarily low, sometimes falling below 10%. According to Mathis, “people with psychiatric disabilities and others who have been historically excluded from employment need the Commission’s attention now.”

According to the regulatory agenda, the Commission anticipates that it will propose revisions to its current rules by October 2013.