



National Council of EEOC Locals, No. 216, AFGE/AFL-CIO

Survey for EEOC Employees Interfacing with the Pearson Government Solutions, Inc. National Call Center (NCC) Pilot

Background and Overview

In March 2005 EEOC changed its customer service operations. Prior to that time, when the public sought assistance from the EEOC they could call offices directly, most often speaking with Senior Federal Investigators. Callers could either use the local exchange or dial 1-800-669-4000, which would connect them to the closest office. In September 2004, EEOC entered into a two year \$4.9 million contract “pilot” with Pearson Government Solutions to handle answering questions from the public about the EEOC. After March 2005, calls to EEOC’s 1-800 number were switched to the Pearson Call center, where they are now answered by 36 private operators, who receive one week of training in EEOC’s laws. Promotional campaigns, the EEOC’s website, and voicemail for EEOC local offices numbers also steer callers to the Pearson call center pilot.

While EEOC claimed it needed a call center to answer an estimated “one million or more unsolicited inquiries received by the Commission each year,” Pearson reports its call volume is only one third of that amount. EEOC’s other basis for contracting out customer service was to allow EEOC staff “to focus on mission related duties.” The same month the pilot began, the National Council of EEOC Locals, No. 216, AFGE/AFL-CIO, the union which represents EEOC employees, began a survey for employees interfacing with the Pearson call center. The purpose of the survey was to find out if the Pearson call center is providing meaningful assistance to EEOC staff and in turn to the public.

Conclusion of the Survey

The conclusion of the survey is that the performance of the Pearson call center is sub-par. The call center has not assisted EEOC investigators in decreasing their call volume or saving time in the charge filing process. The call center has also not improved customer service, because it frustrates callers by creating an additional hoop they must jump through before they can receive meaningful assistance.

Survey Respondents

Of the persons responding, 87% were Investigators. The remaining were mostly Investigative Support Assistants, Office Automation Assistants, Attorneys and Administrative Judges. Thus, a marked majority of participants were investigators, who are the bulk of EEOC’s workforce. Investigators are also most likely to interact with private sector employees needing to file a charge of discrimination.

Survey Method

The survey was posted on the Council 216 public website. EEOC employees were informed of its presence. One hundred and sixteen employees responded from 33 different EEOC field offices.

Summary of Results

Employees were asked to rate their experience interfacing with the Pearson National Call Center on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being best and 1 being worst.

- **79% of employees rated the experience unsatisfactory (either a 1 or 2).**
- **51%** of employees gave the lowest rating of 1.
- **2%** graded the experience as a 5.

These ratings were consistent with the comments received.

Employees were asked to respond to questions to rate the level of assistance the Pearson Call Center Pilot has provided.

- **85%** of employees responded that the number of calls they need to return has either stayed the same or increased, since the implementation of the call center.
- **57%** of employees report that calls that come through Pearson take more time than it would have taken if the caller had not initially contacted the call center.
 - This figure increases to an astounding 91% when it includes employees who report that calls take the same amount of time *or* more time when they go through the call center.
- **3%** indicate that it saved time that the call went through Pearson.

Other survey questions and comments support the conclusion that the Pearson Call Center Pilot hinders rather than helps EEOC employees assist the public. This is because Pearson provides only a barebones message regarding the person's claim.

- **56%** of employees report they did not receive useful information from Pearson.

The Pearson Call Center likewise frustrates callers. First, callers often do not understand why they must explain their complaint a second time. Callers also leave the call center thinking that they have a better claim than may be the case.

- **30%** of employees report that callers expressed frustration regarding their experience with the call center.

The number of EEOC charges also dropped in FY '05, indicating callers were either turned away by frustration or misinformation from the Pearson call center experience.

Comments of Survey Respondents

The most frequent comments to the survey can be summarized as:

- Pearson call center creates more work.
- Pearson call center amounts to an extra layer for employees and the public.
- Pearson call center frustrates callers.
- Information from Pearson call center is inaccurate.
- Information from Pearson call center is inadequate to assist in charge preparation.
- Pearson call center not doing its job.
- Pearson call center is a waste of money that could be used better in-house.