



Sharon Baker (center) and Rachel Shonfield (far left), Rhonda Ellison (not pictured) attended Nat'l Council Meeting before AFGE Leg. Conference



Sharon Baker meets with Rep. Watt (D-NC)



Rhonda Ellison with Rep. Cooper (D-TN)



(L-R) Rachel Shonfield, Gabrielle Martin, and Regina Andrew participating in the AFGE Privatization Panel

Local 3599 Well Represented at the AFGE 2007 Legislative Conference *Rachel Shonfield, MMDO*

Local 3599 was once again well represented at the AFGE Legislative Conference, which was held this year in Washington, D.C. from February 25-28, 2007. Local 3599 President, Sharon Baker, and Delegates, Rachel Shonfield and Rhonda Ellison, all participated in the conference. The most important part of the Legislative Conference is actually going to Capitol Hill and visiting the offices of lawmakers who have EEOC offices in their districts. Because Local 3599 is so large, covering fourteen cities and eight states, the more people the better to get out our message, i.e., EEOC is underfunded and needs more frontline staff, not a wasteful call center.

Sharon, Rachel and Rhonda visited over twenty Congressional offices, either meeting with staff or the actual Congressperson. The team especially focused on meeting with lawmakers who are on EEOC's oversight committees or hold leadership positions in Congress. For instance, we met with Senator Shelby's (R-AL) office, who is the Ranking Member of EEOC's Senate Appropriations Subcommittee. We also met with: Sen. Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader, Rep. Price (D-NC), who is on EEOC's House Appropriations Subcommittee; the office of Rep. Clyburn (D-SC), the House Majority Whip; and Rep. Watt, the immediate past chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. We also made a point of meeting with the offices of newly elected members, such as Rep. Castor (D-FL), Rep. Yarmuth (D-KY), and Rep. Cohen (D-TN), in order to educate them about our concerns.

Prior to the conference, stewards were asked to personalize a national union letter template with specific local issues. Then members signed the letters, so that their representatives could hear directly from their constituents. Sharon came up with the idea of these sign-on letters for the 2006 conference. It proved to be such a good tool that other EEOC Locals also used the letters this year. The letters signed by members in our Local's offices addressed staffing shortages, the make-work call center, the negative impact of restructuring, problems with the proposed changes to the Federal sector process, and the agency's refusal to classify bilingual employees properly on their positions descriptions.

During the first part of the conference, before participants visit Capitol Hill, the National Council and Local 3599 let other AFGE members know about the problems at EEOC. Each conference participant received a book of "Issue Papers," which included a piece on the EEOC and is available at www.afge.org. Also, Rachel was included as a panelist at the AFGE Privatization Workshop, where we had the opportunity to inform other members about our negative experiences with EEOC's privatized call center and our efforts to pull the plug on the contract.

Local 3599 members should feel very empowered that their concerns, which are often ignored by EEOC managers, were shared with receptive members of Congress. We all need to build off of this conference to make sure that Congress is updated throughout the year on the troubles at EEOC. Congress has the authority to cut off funds for the call center, to allocate funds to hire frontline staff, and even to prevent an EEOC office from shutting down. But the person that your representative listens to the most closely is you- because you have the power to vote for him or her. That is why in addition to these visits by your Union leadership, who are often not actual constituents, your help is still needed to persuade your own representative or Senators.