

EEOC reorganization aids contract compliance, opportunity enforcement

WASHINGTON — Consolidation of the federal contract compliance program will enhance the ability of the government to enforce equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action requirements on federal contract work, a key U.S. Department of Labor official said.

In prepared remarks before the Air Conference on Equal Employment Opportunity here, OFCCP Director Weldon J. Rougeau noted that the contract compliance function, once scattered among eleven other federal agencies, now rests solely with the Labor Department's Office of Federal Contract Com-

pliance Programs (OFCCP), which he heads.

All programs, regulations and policies associated with contract compliance were integrated into OFCCP on October 8th.

"Consolidation of the contract compliance program means an enhanced ability to enforce equal employment opportunity and affirmative action requirements on federal contract work," Rougeau said.

He added that for protected groups and contractors, contract compliance will be streamlined and made less confusing. He said enforcement of EEO and affirmative action

requirements on federal contract work will be stronger than ever before.

With 71 offices opening in 63 cities, both protected groups and contractors will have easier access to OFCCP offices, and enforcement will improve as this office brings its services closer to its constituents, Rougeau said.

Rougeau said that OFCCP's record of protecting the job rights of women, minorities, religious and ethnic groups, handicapped persons and veterans "is at the highest point in its thirteen-year history."

In 1978, he said, eleven firms received administrative complaints

from OFCCP, almost double the total for all of 1977; several others are awaiting debarment decisions.

Over 100 cases are under investigation for possible enforcement action, and eighteen companies were dropped from the list of eligible contractors — five of them within an eighteen-month period in 1977-78, Rougeau said.

He added that his agency prefers conciliation efforts to debarment for violators of federal EEO and affirmative requirements. Conciliation efforts enable employers to maintain their contracts while increasing job opportunities for protected groups

and this awards monetary or other compensation to victims of discrimination, Rougeau added.

Rougeau also noted that:

• In the past thirteen years, OFCCP has entered into more than 900 conciliation agreements with contractors, back pay awarded to employees who suffered job discrimination has increased. In the first three quarters of 1978, nearly \$6 million was paid to more than 5,000 minorities and women; and

• substantial gains have been made for handicapped workers and veterans. Back pay awards in 1977-78 for 183 members of these protected groups totaled more than half a

million dollars.

Rougeau stated that "OFCCP expects not just to continue, but also to improve this track record. Stronger enforcement means increased job opportunities, and that is OFCCP's ultimate goal."

In concluding remarks, Rougeau noted that women, the handicapped, Hispanics, Blacks and other groups depend on OFCCP for the expeditious administration of justice in the job market.

"Consolidation offers us a hope for the restitution of a dream which has been to many a dream deferred," Rougeau said.

Sickle diagnosis made easier

A new and safer method for prenatal diagnosis of sickle cell anemia, a common, severe birth defect among Black children, has been reported by scientists of the University of California, San Francisco, in the October 28th issue of *The Lancet*, a British medical journal.

Developed by Dr. Yet Wai Kan and Andrew M. Dozy of UCSF and San Francisco General Hospital, the method involves direct analysis of the region of the gene affected by the sickle cell mutation using fetal cells from the amniotic fluid. This eliminates hazards of the older method, which requires taking blood from the fetus. Dr. Kan's research has been supported by The National Foundation-March of Dimes and the National Institutes of Health.

Kan and Dozy applied the technique in prenatal diagnosis of a Black fetus at risk for sickle cell anemia, and found it to have one normal and one sickle cell gene. Thus, like the parents, the infant will be a carrier of the sickle cell trait and will not be affected by sickle cell anemia, which is due to the presence of two sickle cell genes. The parents had two previous children, one a carrier and the other with severe sickle cell disease that has already caused blockage of several blood vessels in the brain.

The work, Dr. Kan explained, is an example of clinical application of the latest developments in molecular biology: identification of a specific

gene by a laboratory-made radioactive gene duplicate called complementary DNA, and use of a bacterial enzyme that cuts a cell's genetic material (DNA) at particular points along the gene sequences in the chromosome. The 1979 Nobel Prize for medicine was awarded to one Swiss and two American scientists who pioneered in research related to those enzymes.

"It is gratifying to note the advance made this year in molecular medicine, in which grantees of The National Foundation-March of Dimes' research program have led the way," says Dr. Samuel J. Aji, vice president for research of the voluntary health agency.

"Through Dr. Kan's work, we may soon have a whole new class of genetic markers for clinical diagnosis and gene mapping. Another group of grantees at the Boston Children's Hospital has succeeded in prenatal diagnosis of a rare blood disease called delta-beta thalassemia. Still another grantee team at Columbia University has described the nature of gene deletion in a benign disorder known as hereditary persistence of fetal hemoglobin.

"Birth defects research of the 1980's may be in a whole new ball park because of these and other investigators supported by the March of Dimes," Dr. Aji concluded.

Dr. Kan is professor of medicine and director of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Laboratory at UCSF.

Text books inhibit learning

An answer to the "middle grade slump" in reading achievement across the U.S. is "accurate readability labeling," two Oregon State University education professors report from textbook research.

Reading books for grades 1, 2 and 3 are "on target" as far as reading ease-difficulty is concerned, say Gwyneth E. Britton and Margaret C. Lumpkin.

But it's a different story with reading books for grades 4, 5 and 6, they have found.

"Seventy percent or more of the middle grade stories were written above the publisher's designated reading grade levels and considerably above the reading abilities of the students who were assigned to read them," the two have discovered.

"It is inconceivable that hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal and state dollars are being spent on reading instruction and reading materials without adequate verification of reading level," they say in the fall issue of "Reading Improvement." It is a national journal devoted to the teaching of reading.

Britton and Lumpkin have developed a "computerized readability analysis" program. They used it to evaluate 722 stories in two middle grade reading series — the 1976 and 1977 Harper and Row books and the 1977 Holt books. The reading books are among the most widely used in American schools, it was noted.

The "middle grade slump" in reading achievement long has been a concern for parents and educators, Britton and Lumpkin point out. "Many children who have demonstrated average and above average ability in reading during the primary grades (1, 2 and 3) encounter great difficulty with the reading materials in grades 4, 5 and 6."

Diverse factors ranging from teachers to TV have been blamed for this change in reading performance, they point out in their paper.

"Yet few critics have examined or questioned whether the accuracy of the grade level labeling could be contributing to this problem," the educators continue.

Britton and Lumpkin pose several questions in the paper as a result of their findings:

1. What percent of the stories should be written at the published grade level rating of a text? If seventy percent of the stories in a fourth grade text are written at the sixth, seventh and eighth grade reading levels, should it be labeled and sold as a fourth grade text?

2. Why can't teachers be provided with precisely labeled reading textbooks independently verified by textbook commissions? Or a National Textbook Standards Agency?

3. How can we expect teachers to individualize and prescribe for students when the texts are mislabeled in terms of reading grade level?

4. How can children be gradually challenged by increasingly more difficult stories in a text when the "easy-then more difficult" sequencing does not exist, either within a book, or within a series?

5. Why aren't teachers or textbook committees provided readability documentation prior to textbook selection so that the best series can be purchased which meets the needs of their student populations?

Researchers and educators have developed readability formulas which predict the difficulty of material for the reader, the two education professors stressed.

"The tools for accurate readability labeling are available but are not being used accurately or effectively. Most publishers who submit textbook briefs stating that they have calculated reading levels are using hand calculations on too few samples with only one or two readability formulas."

The Britton-Lumpkin computerized analysis includes the use of the "five best researched and most commonly-used" readability formulas: Spache, Harris-Jacobson, Fry, Dale-Challe and Flesch. The five are brought together in computer programs that provide a quick readability readout for the particular piece of narrative writing under test.

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