

**STATEMENT OF CHAI R. FELDBLUM
NOMINEE FOR COMMISSIONER, EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY
COMMISSION**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
U.S. SENATE**

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Thank you, Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi, and members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to be a Commissioner of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

I am happy to be joined here today by my partner, Nan Hunter, and by my nephew Ephraim Feldblum.

My parents are, unfortunately, no longer alive. But it is from them – and from their journeys in life – that I learned the passion and the commitment that, if confirmed, I will bring to the EEOC.

My mother, Esther Yolles Feldblum z'l, was brought up in a strictly Hasidic Jewish family in Philadelphia. Unlike most of her friends, she went to college and ultimately received her Ph.D. in Jewish history. She died at the early age of 41, but she had already embarked on a career focused on Jewish-Catholic relations. From my mother, I learned the importance of connecting to people and of treating people who are different from ourselves with true respect and dignity.

My father, Meyer Simcha Feldblum z'l, was born in a small town in Lithuania – a town whose entire Jewish community, save my father and one other young girl, was killed during the war. My father survived by hiding in the forests in Poland, and was lucky enough to come to the United States after the war. He was ordained as a Rabbi and received his Ph.D. in Talmudic studies. From my father, who died just a few years ago, I inherited my love for legal text (he studied Talmud; I study the U.S. code), as well as a driving commitment to justice.

My entire professional life has been focused on civil rights and social welfare rights. The clients I have represented at Georgetown's Federal Legislation Clinic over the past 18 years – from Catholic Charities USA, to the David Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law and Epilepsy Foundation, to Workplace Flexibility 2010 – have all been committed to making this world a better place -- for poor people, for people with disabilities, and for workers and their families. And in my other legal work and in my scholarship, I have sought to advance the civil rights of all Americans, no matter their race, creed, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

If confirmed, my approach as Commissioner of the EEOC will be marked by the

commitments I inherited from my mother. I have a strong commitment to hearing different points of view and to truly understanding where other people are coming from. And I have an abiding faith in the goodness of trying to seek common ground and honorable compromise.

That was the role I played from 1987 to 1990, while serving as a lawyer to the disability community as Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act. During that time, I was privileged to work both with heroes of the disability community and with giants of the legislative process, including now Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and, here in the Senate, with you Senator Harkin, and with Senators Ted Kennedy, Orrin Hatch and Bob Dole.

During enactment of the ADA, both the business and disability community were able to have a serious and open dialogue about what would make the law work well – and I feel proud that I was a part of making that dialogue happen. Indeed, the trust and bipartisan effort of the original ADA enabled many of those same players to come together again last year and enact the ADA Amendments Act –again, with open and thoughtful dialogue.

My effort to seek common ground and compromise does not mean that I lose sight of my core values. Those are strongly-held values about equal opportunity and justice. For that reason, I am grateful to have served Catholic Charities USA as its pro bono lawyer for over a decade –helping them carry out their values of Catholic social teaching.

I also have a deep respect for and understanding of religious practice and a deep-seated tolerance for religious difference. I do not think it is possible to grow up as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and not be committed to principles of pluralism and tolerance.

I have found throughout my professional career that adhering to one's values is not inconsistent with finding common ground. It requires a belief in the importance of bringing all players to the table, of listening and hearing various sides of an issue, and finding those commonalities that may exist.

Indeed, in my most recent project, Workplace Flexibility 2010, I have again tried to bring employers and employees together to see if we can find common ground on workplace issues. Through that project, I had the good fortune to work with Vicki Lipnic, my colleague here on this panel, while she was at the Department of Labor under the previous Administration. I hope I am given the opportunity to work with her again as a fellow Commissioner on the EEOC.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these opening remarks and I welcome your questions.