**Equip for Equality Launches New Employment Rights Helpline**

***New initiative seeks to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities***

**May 1, 2017 (Chicago)** Today, Equip for Equality launched an exciting initiative called the Employment Rights Helpline. The Helpline is a new, free, statewide service to provide people with disabilities with legal rights information and advice, as well as self-advocacy assistance to help them navigate employment issues that arise. Equip for Equality is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy System that safeguards the rights of people with disabilities in Illinois.

The concept of the Employment Rights Helpline was an outgrowth of ADA 25 Chicago, a year-long initiative launched by The Chicago Community Trust that inspired hundreds of partner organizations to leverage the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act by expanding inclusion in the Chicago region. The Trust is also the primary funder of the Employment Rights Helpline. “We are very grateful to The Chicago Community Trust, which has been a long-time supporter of Equip for Equality initiatives,” said Zena Naiditch, President and CEO of Equip for Equality. “The latest partnership between Equip for Equality and The Chicago Community Trust is an exciting and innovative program that will allow people with disabilities to maximize their employment opportunities,” said Anna Lee, the Trust's Program Officer of Basic Human Needs & Social Services.

Historically, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities has been significantly higher than that for the general population making the need for an Employment Rights Helpline especially critical. “Work is a fundamental part of adult life providing dignity, purpose, self-esteem and a sense of belonging to the community,” said Barry C. Taylor, VP for Civil Rights and Systemic Litigation at Equip for Equality. “Unfortunately, discrimination against people with disabilities remains pervasive in the workplace. The Helpline is an important new tool to promote equal opportunity and combat discrimination.”

To access the Helpline, people with disabilities can call toll-free: 1-844-RIGHTS-9 (or

1-844-744-7489) and a trained attorney will respond to the call. People with disabilities can also email the Helpline at employment@equipforequality.org.

Helpline staff can:

* Discuss legal rights under the ADA
* Answer employment rights questions
* Assist with reasonable accommodation requests
* Help understand options
* Share fact sheets, sample letters and forms

“Equip for Equality has extensive experience assisting people with disabilities on employment issues,” said Rachel Weisberg, Manager of the Employment Rights Helpline. “The Helpline will provide an efficient and convenient way for us to answer questions about ADA employment rights, recommend self-advocacy strategies, and provide legal advice on an array of employment rights issues to job seekers and employees with disabilities.”

Building on its successful Special Education Clinic Helpline, Equip for Equality will be reaching out to the private bar for pro bono assistance with the Employment Rights Helpline. It is anticipated that pro bono attorney participation will exponentially expand the Helpline’s capacity, allowing Equip for Equality to assist many more people with disabilities.

For more information contact:

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Information about the Helpline can be found on-line at: [www.equipforequality.org/employment](http://www.equipforequality.org/employment)