

# A commitment to injured letter carriers



**Kevin  
Card**

**G**reetings, brothers and sisters. I have accepted appointment by President Rolando as assistant to the president for workers' compensation. The NALC has a long history of commitment to helping injured letter carriers on the workroom floor and with the federal Office of Workers' Compensation (OWCP). I look forward to working to keep that commitment.

There are two great challenges injured letter carriers face today, one old and one new. The first is obtaining acceptance of their claims by OWCP; the second is the threat from both the Postal Service and Congress to radically change workers' compensation for postal employees.

Early in my career as a letter carrier in Oregon, we delivered newspaper-sized advertising to every address, two times a week. The extra weight led to many injuries as letter carriers struggled under the heavy load. I suffered a minor back strain carrying a long loop loaded with the extra mail in my shoulder satchel. It was my first OWCP claim. I consider myself lucky; rest followed by physical therapy had me back to work soon. A lot of our injured brothers and sisters are not so lucky.

There are many reasons why injured workers struggle to get their work-related injury covered by the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA). FECA protections have been law since 1916, providing medical treatment, wage-loss compensation and other benefits for injured workers. You would think that a law that old would be easy to navigate. So why do many of our injured brothers and sisters continue to face so many obstacles?

**As letter carriers, we often tolerate small injuries on a daily basis.** Routine aches and pains become common and we can often fail to recognize serious injuries as they occur. Many injured carriers have said, "I thought I could walk it off..." only to find themselves struggling with long-term injuries. Proper submission of a CA-1 or CA-2 claim, and getting your signed receipt, is the first step in getting your claim started. Delays in submitting a claim can complicate the establishment of your rights to OWCP benefits.

Once your claim has been submitted, necessary medical information from a qualified physician establishing causality needs to be submitted. Once accepted, your claim requires constant maintenance to help you recover and return to work if possible. Any misstep in this process can lead to long and costly delays.

We are all one serious accident away from a career-

changing injury. It's bad enough that postal managers are either ignorant or, at worst, abusive of the rights of our injured members. Our national contract and Postal Service manuals mandate the Postal Service to follow FECA regulations. Branch officers can and should grieve any violation of those obligations.

The business of the Postal Service continues to evolve and letter carriers face new challenges along with the changing work environment. The welcomed increase in parcel volume also increases our exposure to lifting injuries. As letter carriers, we need to be cognizant of these hazards and make a conscious effort to protect ourselves from injuries and practice safe lifting. Don't be coerced by your managers to rush to meet unreasonable standards. Always take the time to do your job safely and avoid injury.

Letter carriers also face threats as both the Postal Service and lawmakers propose radical changes to workers' compensation law through pending postal legislation. Postal Service workers' compensation costs provide an easy target for those allegedly trying to save the Postal Service from its current congressionally mandated financial difficulties.

Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe has proposed that the Postal Service be allowed to develop and administer its own workers' compensation program and remove injured postal employees from the protections provided by FECA. In Congress, S. 1486 contains language reducing FECA benefits to the detriment of postal employees. Neither of these proposals contain the important protections needed by letter carriers working in today's postal environment.

**Justice has always been the goal of workers' compensation law.** We live in an age when corporations view workers as easily replaced disposable capital. FECA laid the path for broader workplace protections later enacted. Removing or reducing FECA protections is part of a broader attempt to dismantle the Postal Service. This is not just an attack on the rights of injured letter carriers; this is about the right of all workers to work in a safe environment, get help for their work-related injuries and retire healthy.

The NALC is committed to helping every injured member receive the care and treatment he or she deserves. We will not let the Postal Service, Congress or OWCP deter us from that goal. If you get injured on the job, report it immediately—it's your right. If your manager fails to properly respond to you, contact your shop steward or call your branch immediately. The NALC is here to help every injured member; we work for you.