

# Making high-quality six-day delivery a reality



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**W**e celebrate a great legislative victory in this month's issue with the passage of the Postal Reform Act, after 12 years of hard work. (See page 4.) Among the major achievements in the new law is a provision that mandates that the Postal Service provide integrated delivery of mail and packages at least six days a week. Of course, such a mandate has been in place since the early 1980s, but we've had to renew it each year through the budget appropriations process—sometimes over the strong opposition of postal management. Putting the mandate in permanent

law was a way to strengthen our commitment to the quality of service we provide to America's households and businesses. But strengthening the law alone is not enough—as we have seen with the Postal Service's national staffing shortages in recent months. Because of these shortages, there are many communities in the United States that are not receiving service six days a week. This not only harms the customers and citizens we serve, it also adversely affects far too many overworked and stressed-out city letter carriers. This situation is simply not acceptable, and the NALC is working in a variety of ways to combat it.

**Of course, part of the problem is the result of labor market changes brought on by the pandemic.** Most delivery companies in the United States—and many other service-providing industries—are struggling with job vacancies, staff shortages and staff-retention problems. The Great Resignation is a real thing. But staffing problems within the Postal Service did not begin with the COVID-19 pandemic. Over time, we've learned that a lot of postal management's staffing problems are self-inflicted wounds. For example, we are finding that in many cases, vacant positions are not being posted for bid. Or that postal managers maintain city carrier assistant (CCA) letter carriers on their rolls who no longer work there or never showed up after being hired. And in some cities across the country, management is unable to hire non-career employees.

The negative effects of this staffing shortage, beyond the outrageous fact that routes consistently go undelivered in some locations, have been enormous. In thousands of delivery units,

the Postal Service is routinely violating work-hour limits in our contract, for overtime-desired list (ODL) and non-ODL carriers alike, and for CCAs and part-time flexibles as well. As a result, CCA retention rates continue to decline, and the chronic staffing shortages we now face have even begun to adversely affect the Postal Service's ability to retain career city carriers.

While appropriate grievances are being filed to compensate letter carriers for forced overtime and work-hour limits in violation of the National Agreement, we also are engaging management at the headquarters level to resolve staffing issues with additional career conversions, and where and when necessary, with direct hiring of career employees.

**The data that management has been relying on to evaluate staffing does not accurately depict the number of carriers needed in far too many offices.** Nor does it expose the routine contractual violations of Article 8 or the incidents of routes not being delivered six days a week. We will continue to use the data provided by our branches through our regional offices to develop staffing solutions in each of the affected installations.

We also will continue our joint work in the City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force, which includes subcommittees on staffing, contract compliance and CCA attrition. The committee on CCA attrition is expanding its pilot sites aimed at improving the work experience of new employees. CCA retention has improved in those pilot sites where baseline staffing is sufficient, but any such program has little chance of success in the offices with chronic staff shortages.

We will continue to address the staffing situation with every tool at our disposal. But the reality is this: The executive management of the Postal Service has the responsibility to overcome the staffing shortages, especially those caused by its own administrative failings. To succeed in this effort, management must reconsider its reliance on lower-paid, non-career workers. As we argued in our most recent interest arbitration, that approach has not been working, and is not working—and this was the case even before the pandemic disrupted the U.S. labor market. It has not worked in terms of the quality of service USPS provides, and it has not worked for the city carriers with respect to their job satisfaction. We made progress in the current contract with an automatic conversion to career status for carriers who are still CCAs after 24 months of relative standing, but let's face the facts: It has become increasingly difficult for postal management to hire lower-paid, non-career letter carriers—and in some places, it has become virtually impossible.

Six-day delivery is now required by law. But to make sure that it is universally implemented and a day-to-day reality, it appears that an all-career city carrier workforce is essential.