

Carriers call for stricter prosecutions, more help from the community

Letter carriers from several branches around the country are rallying to declare “enough is enough” and to make sure their local communities know about the surge in robberies and assaults against their postal carriers.

NALC President Brian L. Renfro crisscrossed the country in October and November, speaking at rallies. He told local media in several cities that in 2023 there have been more than 2,000 violent attacks on letter carriers, up from the 700 reported the previous year. And, he said, more needs to be done in response.

“Since 2020, only 14 percent of these crimes have had both an arrest and a prosecution,” Renfro said. NALC is calling for a more aggressive approach, including that these crimes against federal employees be prosecuted at the federal level.

The prosecutions that have occurred have often been at the local level, where penalties are not as severe as those available to federal prosecutors.

It takes a joint investigation among the Postal Inspection Service, the U.S. attorney general’s office and a local police force to hand the case to federal prosecutors. That, combined with the low number of such cases being prosecuted in the first place, reduces the deterrence to potential lawbreakers who aim to attack letter carriers.

“When these crimes are not prosecuted, it sends a message to criminals that they can get away with robbing a letter carrier,” President Renfro said.

“I am furious that our members continue to be targeted and harmed with no end in sight,” he added. “I have said many times that there is no single solution to this disturbing problem,



Top: NALC President Brian L. Renfro leads the rally in San Francisco on Nov. 3.



Left: Letter carriers and their families turn out for the Houston rally, held on Oct. 25.

but more can be and must be done, and it must be done immediately.”

He explained that while carriers often notice matters in the neighborhood that need to be addressed, such as mail piling up, the signs of a fire, a missing child, for example, now carriers need the help of residents.

“We’re simply asking all of you to look out for us the way we have looked out for you,” Renfro said at a rally in Detroit on Nov. 6. “We should not have to be here today. This has to stop.”

On Oct. 24, Denver, CO Branch 47 held a rally in nearby Aurora, where Colorado State Association President **Rick Byrne** told attendees, “We’ve had an increase in robberies and assaults on letter carriers in Denver [of nearly 300 percent].”

He told of two letter carriers he knew who quit after being assaulted. “It was just too much for them to take, to have to come back and look over their shoulder all the time,” he said. Several carriers are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). “It used to be that no one messed with the mail carrier,” he said. “It seems like the tide is turning.”

Byrne said that he was hopeful postal management and postal inspectors would do more. “They are communicating, but we need more awareness and possibly legislation to protect carriers across the country. It affects everybody.”

The next day, Houston, TX Branch 283 held a rally at the North Shepherd Post Office. The number of incidents



Detroit, MI Branch 1 members at its rally on Nov. 6

is up in Houston as well, where there have been at least 25 robberies targeting carriers in the last year.

“That’s just since January,” Region 10 National Business Agent Shawn Boyd told the attendees. “Those numbers are numbers we haven’t seen before, and we’ve been carrying mail for over 100 years.”

To put a face to the numbers, Branch 283 carrier **Ulysses Wells** told of an incident that happened to him in 2022. While putting mail in the boxes of a subdivision, three men got out of a car, assaulted him, and stole his Arrow Key and personal belongings. He still thinks about it.

“When I’m at work, I’m just nervous,” he said. “I’m just praying for the safety of my co-workers. I try to look out for them. They try to look out for me.”

“This is terrible, this is scary, this is frightening,” he said. “We need protection. And we need protection now.”

President Renfroe then returned to the area where Greater East

Bay, CA Branch 1111 had previously held a rally on Oct. 12 (see the November issue of *The Postal Record*). On Nov. 3, San Francisco Branch 214 gathered to draw attention to the crime in its city across the bay.

“We chose this location because in the past month we had 11 robberies here in San Francisco,” Branch 214 President **Karen Eshabarr** said. “Seven of those were from this unit. It’s heart-wrenching. Our poor carriers are being terrorized.”

Renfroe explained that as more Americans receive goods shipped through the mail, the profile of letter carriers becomes larger. “People know we’re carrying more packages than we normally do, so it just stands to reason that we could become larger targets,” he said. “That’s most definitely a concern.”

At the Nov. 6 rally in Detroit, Branch 1 President **Sandy Laemmel** told attendees that local incidents have been happening almost weekly, and she called on the community to keep watch.

“They can be the eyes and ears,” she said. “You usually know when your mail is coming. You usually see your letter carrier’s vehicle, you usually know where they park. Be observant of what is going on around us. If you see something that looks totally out of the ordinary, pick up the phone and call 911.”

Branch 1 member **Matt McBee** spoke about a day in July when, as he

stood at the mailboxes of an apartment complex, he felt a gun barrel pressed against his head. Two teens in masks and hoodies stole the letters he had and his Arrow Key.

McBee took time off from work but continues to have flashbacks. “I have to live with that. It’s very hard,” he said. “It’s the day I almost didn’t come home.”

Western Wayne Co., MI Branch 2184’s **Trang Do** had been on the job for only nine months when she was robbed. “I never [thought it would] happen to me, and I couldn’t breathe when I think about it,” she said.

Laemmel told the crowd of carriers, co-workers and the media, “We want to go home in the same condition we got here.”

NALC is leading the call for strong action to stop the trend, with the four rallies mentioned in this article following the initial four, in Chicago, Cincinnati, Compton and Oakland. The rallies, President Renfroe said, aim “to bring attention to these violent attacks against our members. That’s why we’re sending a very clear message: This violence against our members has to stop.”

He continued: “Every employer has a duty and obligation to protect its employees on the job. The Postal Inspection Service is not protecting us, and the U.S. Department of Justice is not doing its job prosecuting these crimes.

“Postal inspectors and postal police officers work diligently to investigate and prevent instances of violence



‘Enough is enough’ (continued)

against our employees,” he said, and added, “and yet, current methods of prevention clearly are not working. The situation is worsening.”

Renfroe called on the Inspection Service’s leaders to do more: “Times have drastically changed, and methods for protecting our members while we do our job must reflect the current circumstances.”

President Renfroe said that in addition to more frequent and stronger prosecutions, NALC would also like to see newer technological versions of the Arrow Keys that criminals are after.

“A big part of the solution is to devalue that key, potentially using a technology solution so that if they did get their hands on it, it wouldn’t be nearly as valuable and wouldn’t give them the access that they currently have,” he said.

The rallies are part of NALC’s effort to get out a multifaceted message—to the Postal Service to better protect letter carriers on their routes; to locally based federal prosecutors to take these cases and apply the more harsh federal penalties that local prosecutors do not have available; to residents to alert authorities if they see anything worrisome and to preserve evidence, such as doorbell or other surveillance videos, for use by investigators; and to their elected representatives to be aware of the need for solutions.

Another way NALC is getting the message out is through reports by regional TV broadcasts, radio shows, newspapers and online news outlets about the surge in violence nationwide. Having the letter carrier perspective as a central element in these media reports increases community awareness of the issue and helps



President Renfroe declares “Enough is enough” at the rally in Denver, CO, on Oct. 24.



Denver, CO Branch 47 members call on the community to help prevent crimes against letter carriers.

strengthen NALC’s push for solutions. That is especially so because of the widespread public support for letter carriers, who in poll after poll have for years topped the list of the most trusted and highly regarded federal employees.

President Renfroe called on local branches to hold rallies such as the ones that have already been held. Branch leaders are encouraged to contact their national business agents’

offices for information and material to help organize a rally or for help contacting the media to amplify our message to their communities.

“Events like these make a difference and bring awareness to this growing problem,” he said. “I encourage all NALC branches, especially in areas that are experiencing an uptick in crime, to mobilize and plan similar events. When we all come out with a unified message, we are heard.” **PR**