



News from Washington

Paid family and medical leave bill reintroduced in House and Senate

Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA) reintroduced the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act (H.R. 856/S. 274) on Feb. 7. The bill would provide up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for federal employees, including Postal Service employees.

Employees could use this paid leave for personal illness, caring for a family member, or time off work needed for a family member leaving for or returning from active military duty. Federal employees are currently entitled to 12 weeks of leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for such reasons, but it is not guaranteed paid leave.

Sen. Schatz and former Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced the same bill in the 117th Congress, but the legislation did not reach the floor of either chamber.

As this magazine was going to print, the legislation had 10 co-sponsors in the Senate—nine Democrats and one independent—and 29 co-sponsors in the House—28 Democrats and one Republican.

House oversight committee holds hearing on OPM's effectiveness

On March 9, the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability held a hearing to examine the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) effectiveness. OPM Director Kiran Ahuja testified, and committee members questioned her on the steps OPM is taking to improve efficiency, teleworking policies for the federal workforce, and on the implementation of health care provisions included in the Postal Service Reform Act.

Chairman James Comer (R-KY) and Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) questioned Ahuja on OPM's readiness to implement the Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) program by 2025. Ahuja recognized the "aggressive timeline" and assured the committee that the agency was on track for successful implementation under the law. The new program will potentially serve 2 million new enrollees.

Overall, committee members expressed their frustrations with OPM's retirement services delays. Several Republican members attributed these wait times to increased teleworking that started during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they requested figures on the number of federal employees still working remotely.

House and Senate introduce bill expanding care options for federal workers injured on the job

On Jan. 30, Reps. Tim Walberg (R-MI) and Joe Courtney (D-CT), and Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) introduced the Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act (H.R. 618/S. 131).

The bill would expand care options by amending the Federal Employees' Compensation Act to allow workers injured on the job to receive treatment from physician associates/physician assistants (PAs) and nurse practitioners (NPs). Current law prohibits PAs and NPs from treating federal workers in worker compensation cases.

Increasingly, PAs and NPs provide critical care to patients, especially in rural and underserved communities. This bill would increase the number of eligible providers, making it easier

for injured federal workers, including letter carriers, to access the care they need.

"If you are injured on the job, finding convenient care with the provider of your choice is critical," NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said. "NALC supports this bill, which would expand care options for letter carriers, and all federal employees, who are injured on the job."

Bill to make daylight saving time permanent introduced in House and Senate

Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) reintroduced the Sunshine Protection Act of 2023 (H.R. 1279/S. 582) on March 1. The bill would make daylight saving time permanent and end the clock changes that take place every November and March.

Under current law, when clocks change in November, it gets dark as early as 4:30 p.m. in some parts of the country, causing letter carriers to spend more hours working in the dark. If enacted, the bill could decrease the hours worked in the dark by letter carriers.

Along with fewer hours worked in the dark, studies show that making daylight saving time permanent could benefit the public's health, help the agricultural economy and lower energy usage.

Currently, the bipartisan legislation has 14 co-sponsors in the Senate—seven Republicans and seven Democrats—and 23 co-sponsors in the House—22 Republicans and one Democrat. The Senate passed a previous version of this bill in the 117th Congress, but it was not considered on the House floor. **PR**