



NALC declares



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Cincinnati, OH, letter carrier **Taylor Whitt** told a crowd of co-workers, supporters and journalists that in the year and a half of her short career as a letter carrier, she's been assaulted on the job not once, but twice. The first time was when the Branch 43 member tried to help in a domestic incident while delivering the mail.

"I thought, 'This will never happen again,'" she said, downplaying the event as a one-time thing.

But nine months later, Whitt was robbed at gunpoint.

"He saw me, he came after me, he attacked me and grabbed me by the neck and threw me into some trash cans, threw me out into the street," she said. While she refuses to quit the job she's passionate about, she's been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I now have PTSD," Whitt said. "And I thought that was something only reserved for veterans—people who aren't me. I didn't think it would ever be me."

Whitt told her story at a local NALC rally on Aug. 30 held to highlight the surge in criminal attacks on letter carriers that is occurring not just in Cincinnati, but nationwide.

"We've had 17 assaults or armed robberies [in Cincinnati] since January of 2022, so it's right about one a month," Cincinnati Branch 43 President **Ted Thompson** said. "The emotion that comes about is outrage."

While that number is solely for the Cincinnati area, communities throughout the country have seen a similar

marked increase in thefts and assaults in the same time period.

Letter carriers at the rally expressed their anger and their determination to see an end to the assaults and robberies by chanting, "Enough is enough!" They said they have been left to defend themselves and demanded that the Postal Service do more to protect them and that prosecutors aggressively prosecute these crimes—both to hold criminals accountable and to deter future attacks.

"This increase in violence should come with increased protection," NALC President Brian L. Renfroe told those gathered at the rally. "Lately, it feels like we only have each other."

"Since 2020, only 14 percent of crimes against letter carriers have been prosecuted federally," he said. "Fourteen percent. Let that sink in. It's appalling and out of control. This should not be, and we should not let it be."

"Something has to change. We've got solutions technology-wise to make the ways we access mail safer. We also want to increase those prosecution rates," he said.

The Cincinnati rally followed a similar one held in Chicago on Aug. 8.

"We have over 90 reported incidents where letter carriers have been robbed and/or assaulted," Branch 11 President **Elise Foster** told the assembled group. "This is too many."

"Today it is open season on the letter carriers, and it is uncalled for. It is unnecessary and action needs to be taken immediately," Illinois State Association President **Luis Rivas** said.

The rallies are one part of NALC's effort to get out a multifaceted message—

Letter carriers are taking action

Opposite page (from top): Taylor Whitt, NALC President Brian L. Renfroe, the attendees at the Chicago rally

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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; to their representatives to be aware of the need for solutions; to the Postal Service to better protect letter carriers on their routes; and to federal prosecutors to take these cases and apply the more harsh federal penalties that local prosecutors do not have available.

Another way NALC is getting the message out is through regional TV broadcasts, radio shows and print articles about the rash of violence nationwide. Bringing the letter carrier perspective to these media reports increases community awareness of the issue and helps strengthen NALC's call 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. Here are a few recent examples:

After mail was stolen from a letter carrier's vehicle, Baltimore, MD Branch 176 President **Tony Vaughan** told the local ABC affiliate on its July 31 broadcast, "We're out in the community, we're part of the community.

We take pride and sometimes personal ownership of these routes. We see kids grow up, and meet neighbors. And the neighbors look out for us."

Vaughan explained that letter carriers need neighbors and prosecutors to look out for them now more than ever. "It is a federal offense, and we want arrests and prosecutions," he said.

In Concord, NC, when six people were charged with robbing a letter carrier to get access to residents' checks, Charlotte Branch 545 President **Sylvin Stevens** added his letter carrier voice to an Aug. 30 broadcast about the crime. Stevens told the local Fox affiliate, "Before, we were walking around

freely, doing our job and paying attention to what's going on. Now, we're watching over our shoulder, worried that someone might roll up on us."

Region 11 Regional Administrative Assistant **Mike Brim** told the CBS affiliate in Toledo, OH, on Aug. 6 that when letter carriers are on their routes, "People walk up to you all the time to hand you a letter, to say hello, to ask if you delivered something to their house. And now you have to worry about what their motive is when they're coming up to you. It used to be that everyone in the neighborhood knew the letter carrier, and if you messed with the letter carrier, the whole neighborhood had your back."

President Renfroe and others at NALC Headquarters have been working with media outlets on news reports about the dangers confronting letter carriers and our demand that they be stopped. Some of those reports have been disseminated while others are currently being prepared for broadcast or publication.

Legislators also are lending their voices to call for solutions, with members of Congress speaking at both the Chicago and Cincinnati rallies. NALC is working with lawmakers who are drafting bills aimed to provide potential solutions for the epidemic, though none has been unveiled yet.

"Nearly every day, I hear about another horrific assault against one of our members," President Renfroe said. "Every time, I am heartbroken for our brothers and sisters who are victims and for their loved ones. But even more than that, I am angry."

Even though letter carriers are federal employees and crimes against letter carriers performing their duties are federal crimes, recent attacks have frequently been prosecuted by local authorities, watering down sentences to as little as six months, such as for the man who recently attacked Whitt in the second of the two incidents. That's a far cry from the sentences handed down to a trio of thieves who robbed a carrier in South Carolina



Attendees of the Cincinnati rally

PROTECT OUR LETTER CARRIERS

on March 17, 2022. Two received five-year sentences and the other got a seven-year sentence from a federal judge on Aug. 23.

It takes a joint investigation among the Postal Inspection Service, the attorney general and a local police force to hand over the case to federal prosecutors. That, combined with the low number of such cases being prosecuted in the first place, leaves much to be desired in terms of deterring 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 Renfroe said.

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

“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. Word is clearly out among criminals on the streets, leaving letter carriers unfairly forced to defend themselves. These conditions that once seemed unimaginable are the norm now. It is sickening, and it is wrong,” he added.

In addition to federal prosecution, President Renfroe has called on the USPS Inspection Service to increase its efforts at preventing these violent attacks before they occur.

“Postal inspectors and postal police officers work diligently to investigate and prevent instances of violence against our employees,” he said, “and yet, current methods of prevention clearly are not working. The situation is worsening.”

He 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.”

Renfroe called on local branches to hold rallies like the ones in Chicago and Cincinnati, and more rallies were being planned as this issue of the magazine was being prepared. “Events like these make a difference and bring awareness to this growing problem. 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,” President Renfroe said.

Branch leaders are encouraged to contact their national business agents’ offices for information and material to help organize a rally or to contact the media to amplify our message to their communities.

“We will not stand by and wait,” Renfroe said. “We demand respect and protection. We cannot allow the Postal Inspection Service and the Department of Justice to continue to fail our members. We demand that they fulfill their responsibilities and stop these crimes.”

Twice-assaulted Taylor Whitt of Cincinnati knows that communities want to support their letter carriers because she said she’s seen the way residents have supported her. But for her and the other letter carriers who have become and will become victims of violent crime, more needs to be done.

“I feel like there is awareness out there. Everybody knows,” she said. “Enough is enough.” **PR**



Branch 43 President Ted Thompson

Chicago letter carriers

