

Letter carriers in Texas, Oklahoma and Florida say ‘Enough is enough’



Above: NALC President Brian L. Renfroe leads the Jacksonville rally.

Below: The rally in Oklahoma City

Bottom: The rally in Dallas



“**N**early every day, we learn of another incident of violence against a letter carrier. Targeted armed robbery, assault, shootings—and yes, even murder—have become part of our job,” NALC President Brian L. Renfroe told a crowd of NALC members, supporters and the media in Oklahoma City on Feb. 29.

The rally was one of three that NALC branches held in a span of 11 days in late February/early March to raise awareness about the increasing incidents of attacks and robberies against letter carriers. In all, there have been 13 rallies since they began in early August. The rallies occurred before the introduction of H.R. 7629, the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act. (See page 4.)

“Access to mail is their primary

target,” Renfroe said about those committing the crimes, at a rally a week earlier in Feb. 22.

Ahmaud Fleming, a Branch 132 letter carrier whose delivery route is just east of downtown Dallas, spoke at that rally. He said that being robbed at gunpoint

“caught me off guard, man. You would just think it would never happen to you. He comes over there quick with

a gun talking about ‘Give me the Arrow Key! Give me the Arrow Key!’ ”

Fleming said he took three months off after the robbery and had to get counseling to process the trauma.

“There was a time when letter carriers going through neighborhoods carrying mail were off-limits to criminals—those times have changed,” Region 10 National Business Agent Shawn Boyd told rally attendees.

Dallas Branch 132 President **Kim Lewis** said at the rally that since November, more than a half-dozen local postal workers have been targeted.

“Now you’re afraid,” she said of the outlook of her branch’s members. “All of these robberies have caused a big change in the way a letter carrier performs their duties. I’ve had several letter carriers that have been involved in these attacks that have not returned to work.”

At the Oklahoma City rally on the steps of the state capitol, **Jeremiah Grant** spoke about being robbed on his route in April 2022. A masked man came up to him and pointed a gun at him, the Branch 458 member told the rallygoers.

“He kept pulling on the chain and eventually I was able to remove my belt and he took the key,” Grant said. “He is standing behind me telling me not to look at him. I presume there was still a gun pointed at me. The next thing he told me was to give him my cell phone. I took my cell phone out of my pocket, handed it to him. The next thing I heard was the sound of my phone being thrown to the ground and getting smashed.”

After the man took off in a vehicle, Grant was left with an overwhelming fear. He said that he still feels that fear two years later.



The rally attendees march through Jacksonville to raise awareness about crimes against letter carriers.

These attacks aren't random, North Florida Branch 53 President **Jim Thigpenn** said at a March 3 rally in Jacksonville. Hundreds of branch presidents, who were in Jacksonville for a Committee of Presidents meeting, attended the march and rally.

"I mean, every single neighborhood [has been affected]; we've had situations where it happened on the Northside, and then a half hour later, it happened on the Westside in one day," he said. "This is just not tied to a certain side of town or anything like that. It's more of a targeted type of situation."

Eight letter carriers were robbed at gunpoint in Jacksonville last year, in addition to 12 smash-and-grabs. "The community needs to know we are under attack," Thigpenn said. "We are being preyed upon out on the streets."

Thigpenn told the attendees that a gun had been pulled on him while he was delivering mail in 2015. "It was by a teenager who was just showing off for a couple of friends while I was delivering on the Westside of Jacksonville. It was intimidating," he said, before adding that letter carriers shouldn't have to worry about what they will face while doing their jobs.

Unfortunately, it's a fear that letter carriers are coping with throughout the United States.

"It's unacceptable, it's appalling and it's out of control," President Renfroe said. "No workers should ever live in fear while they're doing their job. This violence against our members must stop."

He added: "We're here because this violence should come with an increase in protection, awareness and community. But instead, as is often the case, it feels like we only have one another."

The NALC president noted that, of those 2,000 cases, only 14 percent have led to an arrest and prosecution. Some prosecutions that have occurred have 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 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.

"Do you know what message that sends to people on the street?" Renfroe asked. "Our members are left to defend themselves, because the Postal Inspection Service is not doing its job, and the Department of Justice is failing to prosecute the criminals responsible."

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."

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

He told rally attendees that NALC is working with members of Congress on legislation to help speed up these improvements. He vowed that NALC would make such legislation NALC's top priority in Congress.

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 harsh federal penalties that local district attorneys 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 out the message is through interviews with reporters for local and 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 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 these. 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**