



NALC

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Bulletin

NALC addresses mail service issues

Letter carriers are angry, frustrated and embarrassed by the widespread reports of mail service delays. "We take great pride in serving our customers," NALC President Fredric Rolando said, "but a combination of ill-conceived USPS initiatives and misguided communications, combined with COVID-related staffing shortages, have resulted in delayed mail and non-delivery of routes throughout the country."

The Postal Service also has initiated other operational changes that have made the job of letter carriers more difficult and less efficient. To make matters worse, all of this has happened while letter carriers are dealing with the fear and anxiety of serving on the front lines during a deadly pandemic.

NALC receives daily reports from the field regarding delayed mail and undelivered routes. NALC provides this data to USPS headquarters, holding it accountable for identifying and correcting the source of the directives.

If and when letter carriers have instances of delayed mail and/or undelivered routes, they should inform an NALC branch representative or an NALC national business agent. NALC will continue communicating these service issues to USPS headquarters until they are resolved.

Expedited Street/Afternoon Sortation (ESAS) initiative terminated

In early August, NALC initiated a national-level grievance that has since been settled regarding the Postal Service's unilateral implementation of the delivery initiative test called Expedited Street/Afternoon Sortation (ESAS).

The ESAS initiative substantially alters the Expedited Preferential Mail (EPM) process and other delivery practices and procedures outlined in *Handbook M-39* and *M-41*. These changes directly affect terms and conditions of employment of city letter carriers in violation of Article 19 of the National Agreement.

The implementation of this headquarters initiative, as well as many locally induced variations of this initiative, has been responsible for many of the instances of delayed preferential mail and non-delivery of routes, or portions of routes.

As a result of the grievance settlement, the parties agree that the ESAS pilot test is concluded and terminated as of Aug. 19. Additionally, any future modifications or alternate applications to the Expedited Preferential Mail (EPM) Delivery Program, as outlined in Section 144 of *Handbook M-39*, *Management of Delivery Services* and Sections 223, 450, and 924 of *Handbook M-41*, *City Delivery Carriers Duties and Responsibilities*, will be subject to discussion through the City Delivery Task Force. Furthermore, any grievance pending as of the date of this agreement at any step of the Dispute Resolution Process asserting the ESAS delivery initiative violated the collective-bargaining agreement will be closed.

The settlement (M-01927) can be found in NALC's Materials Reference System on the NALC website.

Sorting Equipment Rationalization (SER) halted

Another unilateral initiative is the Postal Service's implementation of what it calls Post Office Sortation Equipment Reconciliation (SER).

On July 31, USPS notified NALC of the SER initiative and characterized it as a "review," which would solicit "feedback" from employees. However, subsequent documentation showed that the Postal Service has instructed local management to reduce casing equipment and cell sizes, causing widespread violations of the handbooks and manuals while making casing more difficult and less efficient.

A national-level grievance has been filed on the SER initiative, and it was recently halted pending NALC's discussions with the Postal Service on the program.

Misguided park points directives should be reported

NALC has received reports in some parts of the country of management dictating that park-and-loop routes must be reconfigured so that there are no more than four park points on such routes. These appear to be misguided local directives, so if this is happening in your office, **please immediately notify your branch representative or your national business agent so that NALC can get it corrected.**

USPS institutes management restructure

The Postal Service is currently in the process of transitioning to a new organizational structure consisting of three separate operating sectors: Retail & Delivery, Logistics and Processing, and Commerce. The current field structure for processing and delivering the mail consists of 67 districts within seven areas that report to a headquarters chief operating officer (COO). Under the new structure, the delivery and retail sector will consist of 67 districts (for now) within four areas reporting to one headquarters COO, and the processing and logistics sector will consist of 12 divisions within two regions reporting to another headquarters COO.

"Regardless of the operational structure of the Postal Service, NALC will continue to prioritize safe and efficient work methods, good service to our customers, dignity and respect in the workplace, and contractual compliance," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "Regarding delivery operations, we hope we've seen the last of unilateral implementation of reckless initiatives, and we look forward to working with the new operations team in our joint task forces to accomplish our common goals."

Article 34 study

Pursuant to Article 34 notification to NALC, an outside company hired by the Postal Service recently began conducting a study of city carriers' office activities in about 36 sites. Its stated objective is to observe letter carrier office duties and to collect data to potentially develop new work methods or standards.

NALC sent a local or regional representative into each site prior to the study beginning to explain the study to the letter carriers and answer any questions. Once the data collection is complete, those representatives will return and obtain feedback from the carriers involved in the study.

NALC Headquarters will continue to monitor this test closely and exercise its rights as necessary in accordance with Article 34 of the National Agreement. Letter carriers are reminded to continue performing their duties as they normally do, and in accordance with *Handbook M-41* provisions.

This was one of several initiatives implemented by the former postal operations team, which chose to proceed unilaterally, rather than working with NALC through the joint City Delivery Task Force incorporated in the National Agreement. NALC is discussing with the Postal Service whether this unilateral study will be continued, and if so, how the data will be used.

Consolidated Casing Initiative (CCI) update

On June 3, NALC settled a national-level grievance regarding the Postal Service's unilateral testing of Consolidated Casing. This settlement, M-01923 in NALC's Materials Reference System, required that half of the 62 test sites be returned to their original route structure by July 31. The remaining 31 test sites will continue through Nov. 27.

While the consolidated casing has been terminated in the first 31 sites, about half of these sites were not returned to their original route structures and schedules, resulting in non-compliance grievances. Some of the non-compliant sites have been corrected, and NALC will continue to work with the new operations team to correct the rest.

For leave year 2021, maximum annual leave carryover amount increased

NALC and the Postal Service have agreed to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that increases the maximum allowable annual leave carryover amounts outlined in the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)*. For leave year 2021, regular work force career employees covered by the USPS-NALC National Agreement may carry over 520 hours of accumulated annual leave from leave year 2020 to leave year 2021. Normally, as defined in *ELM* 512.321(a.), bargaining unit employees have a maximum leave carryover of 440 hours.

This agreement does not modify any other provisions outlined in the *ELM*, including provisions for payment of accumulated leave. The MOU (M-01928) can be found in NALC's Materials Reference System on the NALC website.

Collective bargaining and interest arbitration update

NALC is prepared to begin the interest arbitration hearings for a new National Agreement. As the union has prepared for the proceedings, it also has continued the negotiations with the Postal Service in an effort to reach a tentative settlement. In just a few short weeks, NALC either will have a tentative agreement, or the union will begin the hearings, which are scheduled to start on Sept. 23.

COVID-19 testing

In NALC President Fredric Rolando's July 15 statement, he reported that the Postal Service had completed its testing of temperature-measuring equipment and identified a company that will provide technicians to conduct what it describes as highly accurate COVID-19 testing in postal facilities.

Since then, the parties have exchanged drafts regarding procedures and protocols for further proof-of-concept tests in a few USPS locations that would include both mandatory temperature measurements and voluntary on-site testing to help curb the spread of the virus.

Once an agreement has been made to do so, it is anticipated that testing of the concept will last for about 30 days.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act affects retirement and Thrift Savings Plan

NALC has received notification from the Postal Service that leave taken under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFRCA) is not eligible for retirement and Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) deductions. This is in accordance with guidance issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which oversees both benefits.

Those who have taken leave under the FFRCA will be issued refunds by the Postal Service for any retirement and TSP contributions, which will be reflected in the Oct. 2 paycheck.

Leave used under the FFRCA, known as Emergency Paid Sick Leave and Emergency Family and Medical Leave Act Expansion, will not affect creditable service time toward retirement eligibility. This leave does not affect the high-3 average salary calculation used for an annuity computation. The annuity calculation for full-time career employees will not be affected.

However, use of FFRCA leave for part-time career employees will have an effect on annuity calculations. Annuities with a part-time career component are prorated based on the hours worked when compared to a full-time position. Leave taken under the FFRCA is not considered basic pay and will be treated similarly to periods of leave without pay (LWOP), which does not increase the total hours worked for the part-time component calculation. **NALC members may contact the NALC Retirement Department with questions regarding part-time career service.**

Carriers may change their election of FFRCA to a different type of leave (such as sick or annual) to keep their retirement and TSP contributions. To avoid a refund, all requests must be entered in AdjustPay before Sept. 11. All TSP-eligible employees may change their TSP election at any time during the year.

The FFRCA will expire Dec. 31, and any unused leave will be forfeited.

Election mail task force formed

On Aug. 18, NALC President Fredric Rolando announced that NALC will begin working with the Postal Service in a joint labor-management task force to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 virus with regard to handling of election mail.

Formation of the task force comes as a result of President Rolando's initial meeting with Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, where he suggested the creation of a joint labor-management task force to meet these specific challenges and work together in response to the public health crisis that is expected to dramatically expand the role of mail voting during the upcoming national election.

Meetings of the joint task force on election mail will begin the week of Sept. 7. The task force will work to establish messaging and protocols ahead of the election to ensure the expedited handling of all political and election mail, particularly for mailed-out ballots, and to assure the public and our election board partners that they can rely on the Postal Service to deliver exceptional service.

Vote-by-mail fact sheet available

NALC has created a new fact sheet called "The 2020 General Election: America Can Count on the U.S. Postal Service." In the fact sheet, the union explains such things as USPS's history and its role in voting by mail, the capacity to deliver the anticipated high volume of ballots, the well-established protocols in place regarding election mail, as well as why the public can feel confident that their ballots will be handled in a safe and secure manner.

The fact sheet can be found on the "Legislative Activities" page of the "Government Affairs" section of the NALC website.

Legislative update

There has been no meaningful progress in negotiations between House and Senate leadership and the White House regarding financial relief for the Postal Service in a new stimulus package. Last month, the House of Representatives passed the Delivering for America Act, a stand-alone postal bill that would provide \$25 billion in direct financial relief to the Postal Service and ensure that no changes in service can be made that would result in delays during the pandemic.

The previously passed Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act from the House and the Senate's Postal Service Emergency Assistance Act were both explained in the previous edition of the *NALC Bulletin*.

Whether the negotiations materialize into a stand-alone postal bill or a broad stimulus bill, NALC will continue to lobby aggressively for direct financial relief, favorable loan terms and hazard pay.

For more information on how to take action, please visit the "Government Affairs" page on the NALC website, and continue to encourage your family, friends and neighbors to do the same by visiting HeroesDelivering.com.

To support its lobbying efforts, NALC commissioned a poll in May on the importance of and funding of the Postal Service during the pandemic. The results of that poll clearly showed that a broad sample of Americans overwhelmingly support both the Postal Service and its direct funding through an appropriation.

In July, NALC again commissioned North Star Opinion Research and Hart Research Associates to survey 1,200 registered voters aged 60 or above across the nation, with 25 percent being veterans. Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed support federal financial assistance for the Postal Service in the next stimulus; the figure is 90 percent among veterans.

Both groups, furthermore, overwhelmingly say that their votes in the fall election will be strongly influenced by whether their elected representatives help provide the Postal Service with the same support provided to other sectors of the economy. Sixty-four percent of those surveyed said they would be less likely to vote for lawmakers who oppose federal support for USPS, a figure that rises to 70 percent among veterans.

Ninety-six percent of the voters polled, including 99 percent of the veterans, 97 percent of those in rural communities, and 94 percent of those registered as Republicans, indicated that the Postal Service is important to their lives and well-being.

USPS in a media storm

The Postal Service finds itself at the center of the media universe, and at the crossroads of politics, election planning and legislative maneuvering. The current state and future of the Postal Service have the attention of the entire nation, as public support for protecting the level of service they rely on and securing its financial health continues to grow.

"The bottom line is that the country highly values our services in normal times, yet with the upcoming election and the new world pandemic, the American people need their Postal Service more than ever," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "The recent lapses in service have placed legitimate fears in the minds of the public regarding the Postal Service's ability to deliver what they need, when they need it."

So amidst the media storm, NALC will continue to directly focus on what it is doing internally and externally to keep letter carriers as safe as possible through the pandemic, to restore service disrupted by misguided directives and initiatives that have caused delays and non-delivery, to prioritize our commitment to successfully handle the increased volume of mail ballots and restore the public's confidence in USPS's ability to do so, and to secure the pandemic-related appropriations from Congress.

"At this point in time, using the media to effect change would be a last resort," Rolando said.

Stamp Out Hunger Donor Drive continues

NALC launched a virtual food drive, the Stamp Out Hunger Donor Drive, to raise funds for food banks nationwide until it is safe to conduct the food drive.

By visiting nalc.org/food, donors can find a food bank in their area to support with an online donation. The site links directly to donation pages on each food bank's website.

As with the traditional Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive, donations will stay in the communities of the donors.

NALC September Branch Challenge for MDA now underway

With the COVID-19 pandemic making it difficult for branches to hold MDA fundraisers, in support of programs such as summer camps as well as medical research, NALC Assistant to the President for Community Services Christina Vela Davidson issued a branch Deliver the Cure challenge in September. She asked branches to create a virtual donation page to support NALC's 2020 campaign for MDA, and called on every letter carrier to give at least \$10 to MDA through the branch's donation page.

It's easy to create a fundraising page by going to mda.donordrive.com/event/nalc2020 and clicking "Create a page." Donations are tracked by branch, with all fundraisers listed on the page.

"Canceling MDA events and camps is disappointing," Davidson said, "but letter carriers are creative, and they don't give up. I look forward to seeing the different ways, including online donor campaigns, that our branches devise to keep resources flowing to MDA in 2020 and to support its vital efforts."

National Association of Letter Carriers

100 Indiana Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20001-2144
202-393-4695 | www.nalc.org

Fredric V. Rolando, President

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Philip Dine, Director of Communications and Media Relations
Mike Shea, Designer/Web Editor
Rick Hodges, Writer/Editor
Jenessa Wagner, Writer/Editor
Clare Foley, Editorial Assistant

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