



# National Agreement ratification ballots mailed

Beginning on Jan. 11, every active letter carrier eligible to vote in the contract ratification election was mailed a copy of the proposed 2019-2023 National Agreement between NALC and USPS.

Included in the mailing is a letter from NALC President Fredric Rolando, a summary of the contract's provisions, a ballot and secrecy envelope, a return envelope and instructions for casting a vote. For a ballot to be counted, it must be received by noon on Feb. 16.

Eligibility to vote is defined by Article 16, Section 1 of the *NALC Constitution*, which provides:

"Ratification shall be a mail referendum vote, and the ballot shall be mailed only to regular members of the NALC, as defined in Article 2, Section 1(a), excluding retirees, OWCP departees, and non-letter carrier regular members, as shown by the records of the National Secretary-Treasurer as of ninety (90) days prior to the date that the proposed agreement is reached."

The proposed agreement was reached on Nov. 25, 2020. The *NALC Constitution* provides that "membership acceptance or rejection of a proposed National Agreement shall be by majority of valid ballots returned by the voters." If the agreement is accepted, it will go into effect immediately. If the agreement is rejected, then, under the Postal Reorganization Act, the parties may continue bargaining or ultimately refer the dispute to an interest arbitration board. Under the law, decisions of the arbitration board are conclusive and binding upon the parties.

President Rolando has appointed a Ballot Committee to oversee the mailing, collection, and tabulation of the ballots. Its members are:

- Delano Wilson (chairman) of Silver Spring, MD Branch 2611
- Homer Christian of Huntington, WV Branch 359
- Ted Lee of Pittsburgh, PA Branch 84
- Chareke Batten of Tidewater Virginia Branch 247
- Sylvin Stevens of Charlotte, NC Branch 545
- Rod Holub of Manhattan, KS Branch 1018
- Andy Weiner of Jamaica, NY Branch 562
- Mike O'Neill of New Jersey Merged Branch 38
- Antonia Shields of Birmingham, AL Branch 530
- Joel Malkush of Saint Paul, MN Branch 28
- Paul Roznowski of Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126
- Ethel Ford of Houston, TX Branch 283
- David Norton of Portland, OR Branch 82
- Barbara Stickler of Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100
- Rene Eberhardt of Casper, WY Branch 1681

## Didn't receive a ratification ballot?

If you are eligible to vote on the proposed agreement and have not received a ballot by Jan. 25, call NALC Headquarters at 202-662-2836 (9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Eastern Time) to request a replacement ballot. A replacement ballot will be mailed after your eligibility is verified.

## Letter carriers in Phase 1b of COVID-19 vaccinations

Last month, COVID-19 vaccines began being distributed throughout the country. However, due to the limited supply of the vaccine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided recommendations to federal, state and local governments about who should be prioritized to be vaccinated.

Health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities were slotted to receive the first vaccines. Those individuals are in what the CDC is calling "Phase 1a" of initial distributions. The CDC has recommended that all Postal Service employees be included in the next round of distributions, or "Phase 1b." This phase also will include front-line essential workers such as firefighters, police officers, grocery store workers and public transit workers.

Currently, the specific dates when Phase 1b will be implemented is unknown, and undoubtedly will differ from city to city and state to state throughout the country. Discussions between NALC and the Postal Service regarding the distribution of the vaccine to letter carriers are ongoing. Once NALC is advised of the distribution schedule, we will communicate it to you so that you can take the necessary steps to obtain the vaccine.

If you have questions about the vaccines, you should consult with your doctor or health care professional. The CDC website also contains information that may be helpful.

## COVID-19 relief and recovery update

The 117th Congress convened on Jan. 3, and while it will be spending much of January configuring operations, leadership, committee assignments and priorities for this Congress, it also will remain responsible for responding to the needs of Americans, as COVID-19 cases spike and relief and recovery needs remain pressing.

Prior to adjourning the lame-duck session of Congress just days before Christmas, lawmakers passed a \$2.3 trillion combined omnibus/relief package that included \$900 billion for COVID-19 relief and \$1.4 trillion to keep the government funded until Sept. 30, 2021. The deal came together after months of failed negotiations between the leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

House Democratic leaders previously had called for a comprehensive \$3.4 trillion deal in additional relief funding, while Senate Republican leaders failed to advance two packages in the \$600 billion to \$900 billion range.

In the end, it was the efforts of a bipartisan group of senators, prompted to act by the House Problem Solvers Caucus (a group whose influence has risen in Congress with its ability to identify areas of commonality and elevate legislation on those issues) that led to the deal. In fact, the Problem Solvers Caucus was instrumental in passage of the Postal Service Fairness Act (H.R. 2382), which moved to repeal USPS's mandate to pre-fund retiree health benefits. That bill was passed in the House earlier this year but was not taken up in the Senate.

Regarding the Postal Service, the deal reached days before Christmas—the Emergency Coronavirus Relief Act of 2020—included language converting the \$10 billion loan previously approved in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Public Law 116-136) into a grant. That is a far cry from the \$25 billion public-service appropriation NALC supported to help the Postal Service cover COVID-19 expenses. On the appropriations front, the government funding measure preserved six-day language for mail delivery.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 deal failed to include hazard pay for letter carriers and other front-line employees. The deal also failed to include an extension of paid Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave provisions for employees whose school or child care is closed due to COVID-19, or the mandate for emergency paid sick leave, which provided up to 80 hours of paid leave for COVID-19-related absences. Both provisions went into effect in April under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) but expired on Dec. 31, 2020. Instead, lawmakers included a tax credit for employers who choose to extend emergency paid sick leave, thus ending the mandate.

"Members of Congress will need to step up to the plate in the next Congress for letter carriers and the Postal Service," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "NALC remains steadfast in ensuring that letter carriers and the network are protected, and we expect the new administration and Congress to do the same as we remain on the front lines of this pandemic."

## COVID-19-related MOUs extended until March 26

By joint agreement (M-01932 in the NALC Materials Reference System), several COVID-19-related memorandums of understanding have been further extended through March 26. These memorandums include temporary expanded sick leave for dependent care (M-01910); temporary additional paid leave for city carrier assistants, or CCAs (M-01911); temporary use of the 7:01 rule (M-01913); temporary workplace changes to promote social distancing (M-01915); and temporary use of temporary carrier assistants, or TCAs (M-01916).

NALC and the Postal Service also agreed to another temporary time limit extension on Step B and arbitration appeals (M-01933), and an agreement giving local parties the ability to develop a sign-up process for full-time employees who previously did not, or could not, place their names on either the overtime desired list or work assignment list (M-01934). Both of these agreements will expire on March 26 as well.

Also extended through March 26 is a USPS memorandum (M-01914) that instructs managers and supervisors to allow liberal changes of schedule to accommodate employees who are dealing with child care issues related to the pandemic. The memorandum also provides for liberal sick leave usage for employees who are sick, and liberal annual leave and leave without pay (LWOP) to the extent operationally feasible, treats COVID-19-related leave as scheduled (as opposed to unscheduled) leave, and directs that leave taken for COVID-19 related reasons during this time not be cited in discipline for failing to maintain an assigned schedule.

Each of the MOUs and the USPS directive can be found in NALC's Materials Reference System at [nalc.org/mrs](http://nalc.org/mrs).

## National Association of Letter Carriers

100 Indiana Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20001-2144  
202-393-4695 | [www.nalc.org](http://www.nalc.org)

**Fredric V. Rolando, President**

### EDITORIAL STAFF:

Philip Dine, *Director of Communications and Media Relations*  
Mike Shea, *Designer/Web Editor*  
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