



## Entering the next phase of negotiations

As previously reported, NALC had continued to negotiate for a new collective-bargaining agreement with the U.S. Postal Service during the statutorily required 60-day mediation period. That period, which began with the formal expiration of the 2019-2023 agreement on May 20, expired on July 19. While discussions on the pay, benefits and working conditions of the country's city letter carriers continued to be productive, the parties had yet to reach tentative agreement.

NALC President Brian L. Renfro and Executive Vice President Paul Barner are working closely together along with the union's lawyers and a team of national officers and staff to reach an agreement with postal management that is worthy of the dedication and hard work of our active membership.

While reaching a voluntary settlement that properly rewards city letter carriers for the work they do delivering the nation's mail remained NALC's goal, preparation has been ongoing for binding interest arbitration, should that become necessary. The meticulous work of marshaling evidence and recruiting expert witnesses to make our case in interest arbitration proceedings has been going on for months.

Under the law, such an impasse would trigger the appointment of a three-member arbitration board comprised of a union advocate, a management advocate and a neutral chair to conduct a binding arbitration to set the terms of a new national agreement.

With the deadline of the expiration of the statutorily mandated 60-day mediation period looming, NALC planned to continue, as has been the case in the past, negotiating with the USPS as the next phase of the process begins.

"As we have in recent rounds of collective bargaining, we will remain at the table with postal management as long as the prospects remain for reaching a tentative agreement that meets our goals," Renfro said on July 14. "But we will move expeditiously to invoke the procedures required by law to resolve an impasse in bargaining, should that prove necessary."

## Supreme Court rules on religious accommodation

On June 29, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Groff v. DeJoy*, in which a former rural letter carrier sued the Postal Service for failing to accommodate his request to not be assigned work on Sundays because of his religious beliefs. NALC, along with the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, filed a joint brief in this case that emphasized the practical difficulties posed by Gerald Groff's request in light of chronic understaffing in the post office where he worked and the potential adverse impact of Groff's request on his fellow employees. The unions argued that the Supreme Court should remand the case to the lower courts for consideration of these factors.

The Supreme Court's decision clarified employers' obligation to accommodate an employee's request for religious accommodation under Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Postal Service is covered by this statute. Under Title VII, such accommodation is required unless the accommodation would impose an "undue hardship" on the conduct of the employer's business. The Supreme Court defined "undue hardship" to refer to "substantial increased cost" and ruled that the test must be applied "in a manner that takes into account all relevant factors."

The Supreme Court ultimately remanded the case to the lower courts to apply this test to the facts of the case, as suggested in the unions' joint brief.

NALC members will be apprised of any effects of this decision on the city letter carrier craft as the judicial process continues in the lower courts.

## Step AA pay adjustments delayed

The Postal Service has informed NALC that the pay adjustments for some part-time flexible letter carriers whose pay was incorrectly calculated while they were at Step AA are being delayed due to "unanticipated problems." These adjustments are in accordance with national-level settlement M-01980. Affected letter carriers were recently notified by a letter from the Postal Service.

NALC reported on April 7 that these adjustments were tentatively scheduled for the July 21 paycheck. USPS states the anticipated date for these adjustments will now be the Sept. 1 paycheck.

**NALC's podcast "You Are the Current Resident" is on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and other podcasting apps.**

**During each episode, guests discuss vital topics affecting the letter carrier craft and the union. The show's format also includes interviews with other NALC leaders to talk in depth about issues affecting letter carriers and the union.**

