# **Update on contract negotiations**

From President Brian L. Renfroe on Oct. 5:

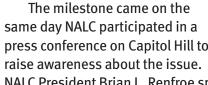
Over the past week, we have narrowed the remaining economic and work rule issues in negotiations with the Postal Service to reach a tentative agreement on a new collective-bargaining agreement for city letter carriers. Negotiations will continue into next week. After a tentative agreement is reached with the Postal Service, the NALC Executive Council will meet promptly to discuss the terms of the deal and a tentative agreement will be finalized. The details will be made available to NALC members at that point, along with information on the upcoming ratification balloting process.

## **Congress moving toward discharging** the Social Security Fairness Act

**NALC President Renfroe encourages the House** 

to vote on the Social Security Fairness Act.

On Sept. 19, the discharge petition for the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82) reached 218 signers, an important step to bring the legislation to the House floor for a vote. The bill would repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO), which are parts of Social Security law that unfairly reduce or sometimes eliminate Social Security benefits of federal annuitants, including letter carriers.



NALC President Brian L. Renfroe spoke at the event that was cohosted by the leads of the bill, Reps. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) and Garret Graves (R-LA).

ON SOCIAL

**SECURITY** 

**FAIRNESS** 

"You know, this has been going on now for 40 years and the letter carriers serve every community in this country every single day. We do way more than deliver the mail; we look out for people and save lives on a daily basis," President Renfroe said at the rally. "What is most unfair is that the people who are victimized by this grossly unfair provision in the law are those, like my members and others that you have heard from and will hear from this morning, who are dedicated civil servants and public servants who look out for and serve their communities. They're the very last people who should be impacted by something like this."

While the discharge petition is closed after reaching 218 signatures, members can still co-sponsor the bill. H.R. 82 is now one of the most co-sponsored bills in Congress, with 329 co-sponsors.

Now, the petition will sit on the House calendar for seven legislative days. After that period, Spanberger and Graves, the filers of the discharge petition, can request a full House vote. According to House rules, after that request, a vote will be scheduled within two legislative days. Sept. 20 counted as the first legislative day. With the current schedule of legislative days, the soonest action could be taken on the bill is mid-November.

With much in flux, including the House's schedule and efforts to pass a continuing resolution to fund the government, it is unclear when the two lawmakers will choose to call for a vote after the allotted time.

NALC will continue closely monitoring this legislation and will inform members when it is called for a vote.

## **Open Season coming for new Postal Service Health Benefits Program**

Open Season for health benefits is almost here again. It will run from Nov. 11 through Dec. 9. But it'll look a little different than in previous years, because this is the first Open Season under the new Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program that was created as part of the Postal Service Reform Act (PSRA) of 2022.

PSHB is a new, separate program within the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. Coverage under the PSHB Program will be effective Jan. 1, 2025, for 1.9 million postal employees, annuitants, and their eligible family members.

Enacted by Congress in 2022, PSRA ended the requirement to pre-fund retiree health benefits decades in advance, which cost USPS an average of \$5.2 billion annually; codified six-day mail delivery into law; and created PSHB to reduce health care costs for USPS and its employees and annuitants by fully integrating their federal health coverage with Medicare. The new law also allowed Medicare-eligible annuitants and their family members who were not enrolled in Medicare Part B previously to enroll in Part B without paying the normal late enrollment penalty during a special enrollment period that ended on Sept. 30.

Most major insurance plans now offered by FEHB in 2024 (NALC HBP, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Kaiser, etc.) have opted to offer those same plans under PSHB in 2025. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will be automatically enrolling all Postal Service members into a PSHB plan that corresponds to their current FEHB enrollment. So, postal employees and annuitants who do not wish to change plans do not have to take any action as long as their current FEHB plan is creating a plan in PSHB. The table at opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/pshb/auto-enroll (also printed in the September/October issue of *The Postal Record*) lists the plan options into which individuals/families will be automatically enrolled. However, Postal Service enrollees, annuitants, and their family members who are currently enrolled in any

FEHB plan that has chosen not to participate in the PSHB in 2025 will need to select a new health insurance plan in the PSHB Program during the 2024 Open Season period. Otherwise, such participants will be automatically enrolled by OPM in the PSHB nationwide plan option with the lowest self-only premium that is not a high-deductible health plan and does not charge a membership fee.

Postal participants needing to select a new plan—either because their current plan is no longer available or because they do not like their current insurer—will be able to review all their options and learn about each option's coverage details before making a new selection during this year's Open Season.

All NALC members should check the table to make sure their current plan is still available and to make sure they will be placed in the plan they want. If you're happy with the plan you're placed in, you don't have to do anything. But if you're not, make sure you enroll in the plan of your choice.

We strongly encourage everyone who isn't currently enrolled in the NALC Health Benefit Plan to take a close look at it during this Open Season—regardless of which plan you are currently enrolled in. The NALC Health Benefit Plan is owned by letter carriers and built for letter carriers. We believe you will find that it will offer the best benefits at the most affordable cost.

Instructions on how to enroll or make changes will be mailed to every participant. Participants without com-

puter access will be able to make enrollment selections by mail. "I encourage all members—active and annuitants—to check and select the plan they're being enrolled into to make sure it best fits their needs," NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said. "I think it is the NALC's Health Benefit Plan. But no matter what you choose, make sure you check and select."

All NALC members will be receiving mailings and other communications from NALC, USPS and OPM. In the coming weeks, be on the lookout to make sure you understand the process and get enrolled in the plan of your choice.

The FEHB enrollment codes listed in the table in *The Postal Record* and at opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/ pshb/auto-enroll may be found on a member's insurance card and the cover page of the plan's FEHB brochure. These codes correspond to the following enrollment types: self-only, self and family, and self plus one.

### Check out the NALC Health Benefit Plan during Open Season

Make sure to check out the NALC Health Benefit Plan, the right choice for letter carriers' health insurance needs. Once again, the HBP is offering competitive rates and a comprehensive benefit package for 2025:

#### **PSHB High Option premiums**

	Enrollment codes	Biweekly employees pay	Monthly annuitants pay
Self only PSHB High Option	77A	\$109.98	\$238.29
Self plus one PSHB High Option	77C	\$266.08	\$576.50
Self and family PSHB High Option	77B	\$238.42	\$516.58

#### **PSHB CDHP premiums**

	Enrollment codes	Biweekly employees pay	Monthly annuitants pay
Self only PSHB CDHP	77D	\$59.13	\$128.11
Self plus one PSHB CDHP	77F	\$133.88	\$290.08
Self and family PSHB CDHP	77E	\$144.92	\$314.00

For more information, please visit nalchbp.org.

# Letter carrier tells White House about working in extreme heat

On Sept. 14, Hattiesburg, MS Branch 938 President Sam Hill was a panelist at the White House Summit on Extreme Heat. He joined White House senior staff, other workers exposed to extreme heat, health care professionals, emergency responders, and researchers and innovators to talk about what it's like to work through the dangers of extreme heat.

The summit comes as the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration is proposing a rule to protect workers in the first-ever U.S. safety standard on heat. The proposed rule includes requirements for identifying heat hazards, emergency response plans, training for supervisors, and work standards, including breaks, access to shade and water, and heat acclimatization for new employees.



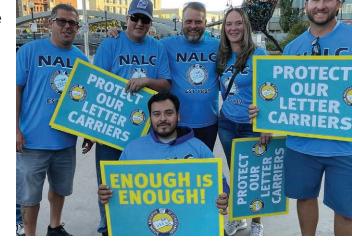


## City and rural carriers rally for **Protect Our Letter Carriers Act**

Chanting "Enough is enough," city letter carriers and rural letter carriers held rallies in August and September to raise awareness about crimes against letter carriers and the need to pass the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act (POLCA), H.R. 7629 and S. 4356.

On Aug. 26, NALC President Brian L. Renfroe joined National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) President Don Maston and other delegates to the NRLCA national convention who rallied in Reno, NV. President Renfroe called on members of the community to report any suspicious activity they see involving letter carriers. "You know, your letter carrier is there to serve you every day," he told a reporter from the local NBC affiliate. "If you see anything out of the ordinary, the safe thing to do is contact law enforcement. You never know, that could be the difference in one of these crimes happening or not."

On Sept. 5, Southern Delaware Branch 906 members were joined by rural carriers as they rallied in Georgetown to support



President Renfroe and other city carriers in Reno, NV.

H.R. 7629. "What that would do is, basically, any crime committed against a postal employee would be just like a crime committed against law enforcement," Branch 906 President Shawn Colleran said. It would result in stiffer penalties, he said, and require that every district have an attorney put in charge of postal crimes. "So, you would have the accountability and the presence, which currently just isn't there."

NALC Director of Retired Members Dan Toth called on residents of Southern Delaware to "look out for us, the way we have always looked out for you."

Like the Reno event, the Delaware rally drew widespread media coverage, from TV affiliates and radio to newspapers. "Targeted robberies, assaults, and even murder have become part of our jobs," NALC President Renfroe said on the day the House bill was announced. "Think about that. Today we are here to send a very clear message: Enough is enough is enough.

"The next step is critical," Renfroe added, "and that next step is federal legislation that will deter these attacks from happening, prosecute every criminal who attacks one of our members, and protect letter carriers while doing their jobs."

This bipartisan House legislation and its Senate counterpart would provide \$7 billion in funding for the Postal Service to secure its infrastructure, including the installation of high-security collection boxes and the replacement of Arrow Keys with more secure electronic versions. The funding would be appropriated over five years, \$1.4 billion annually in fiscal years 2025 to 2029. When key infrastructure is improved, letter carriers will be safer on their routes.

Additionally, the legislation would increase prosecution rates for these crimes by requiring the attorney general to designate an assistant U.S. attorney in each judicial district to prioritize cases involving an assault or crime against a letter carrier. Their principal responsibility in the district would be to coordinate and supervise the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

The bill also would strengthen sentencing guidelines for these crimes, ensuring that they are treated in the same manner as assaults on federal law enforcement officers.

"I urge Congress to pass this bill that would protect the nation's letter carriers who dutifully deliver medications, checks, ballots, packages, and other essential mail that all Americans depend on," President Renfroe said.

Since 2020, there have been more than 2,000 crimes committed against letter carriers on the job, reflecting a mass targeting of letter carriers that previously did not exist. Many of these attacks involve a gun or another weapon. Last year alone, the numbers of carriers injured in robberies doubled from the prior year, according to the United States Postal Inspection Service.

Renfroe called on NALC members to urge their members of Congress to become co-sponsors of H.R. 7629 and S. 4356. As of Sept. 19, there were 125 co-sponsors in the House and two co-sponsors in the Senate.

President Renfroe said that passing POLCA is NALC's legislative priority. He encouraged letter carriers to contact their members of Congress, and to ask supporters within their communities to do the same. Go to nalc.org/ action to learn more.

### **Decision rendered on national-level** LiteBlue hack grievance

On July 12, 2023, President Renfroe initiated a national-level grievance related to the theft of letter carrier wages by cybercriminals who were able to access the USPS Human Resources website, LiteBlue. The issue in this case involved incidents that occurred in late 2022 and early 2023. Hundreds of postal employees, which included letter carriers, fell victim to hackers who were able to access their LiteBlue accounts using dubious tactics. Employee account information was obtained when employees entered their login information into fake LiteBlue websites created by criminals. As a result, these letter carriers had their paychecks misdirected into bank accounts owned by the criminals.

Earlier this year, on Jan. 23 and 24, this case was heard by National Arbitrator Dennis R. Nolan in Washington, DC. Since employees represented by the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) were victims of the theft as well, both unions intervened and presented their cases before Arbitrator Nolan.

At the hearing, NALC's counsel outlined the numerous contractual violations the Postal Service had committed when it failed to ensure that letter carriers were paid for their time on the clock. Additionally, arguments were made outlining the Postal Service's failure to protect its systems from hackers when it did not institute the use of multifactor authentication (MFA) until after the attacks occurred. Post-hearing briefs were submitted to Arbitrator Nolan by all parties in mid-April.

Arbitrator Nolan denied NALC's grievance. In his award, he posed the questions, "What do the parties mean by the employer's obligation to 'pay' employees? Is it enough to make a direct deposit in the bank account on record, or must the Postal Service take further steps to make sure the employees actually receive the direct deposit money? To put it differently, may the Postal Service simply act on the banking information it has or must it act as a guarantor for employees victimized by cyber criminals?" Arbitrator Nolan opined, "The term 'pay' is ambiguous. It could fairly be applied either way. To prevail, how-

ever, the Union has to prove that its interpretation is superior to that of the Postal Service—that the Postal Service actually violated some provision of the Agreement. The Union failed to do so. The grievance must therefore be denied." He ended his award with, "The Union failed to prove that the Postal Service violated any specific provision of the National Agreement by failing to pay employees after unauthorized access to LiteBlue resulted in changes to direct deposit information."

The entire decision can be read on nalc.org.

### Bill introduced to allow USPS to ship alcohol

On Sept. 17, Sens. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) introduced the USPS Shipping Equity Act (S. 5069). The bill, which is identical to legislation introduced in the House in May 2023, would allow the Postal Service to ship beer, wine, and other alcoholic beverages directly from licensed producers and retailers to legal customers.

Current law prohibits the Postal Service from shipping alcoholic goods, making private shippers such as FedEx and UPS the only option for wineries, breweries and other producers to have goods delivered directly to customers. This bill would allow USPS to ship these beverages and would generate an estimated \$190 million annually in new revenue for the Postal Service.

If passed into law, USPS would have two years to develop regulations ensuring that the Postal Service is prepared to safely deliver alcoholic beverages to adult consumers with appropriate identification checks. The bill also would expand access for direct-to-consumer alcoholic shipments.

Unlike private shippers, USPS delivers to every address in the nation. The current ban on the Postal Service from shipping alcohol limits access to these products for many Americans, especially in rural areas.

"NALC applauds Sen. Merkley and Sen. Gillibrand for introducing the USPS Shipping Equity Act," NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said. "The bill is an important step toward meeting the growing needs of our customers while generating revenue for the Postal Service, expanding the agency's service opportunities, and supporting small businesses nationwide."

The House version of the bill (H.R. 3721), introduced by Reps. Dan Newhouse (R-WA) and Jennifer Wexton (D-VA), currently has 22 co-sponsors.

Visit nalc.org/action to ask your members of Congress to co-sponsor the legislation.

# **Fundraising for MDA**

NALC is holding two MDA fundraising challenges. You can register your branch for online fundraising with MDA at mda.donordrive.com/event/NALC2024. NALC branches have already raised more than \$500,000 this year.

#### October Branch Challenge

How your branch can get involved:

• Step 1: Branch presidents or MDA coordinators can find their branch page or get help customizing it by connecting with us at 312-392-1100 or at nalc@mdausa.org.

• Step 2: Fundraise. Encourage members to fundraise or donate. Set up a Facebook fundraiser in October. Host an event. Or send in your donation from an event that has completed. Branch Challenge details:

- Contest dates: Oct. 1-31.
- Each week in October: Top 10 branches receive recognition.
- At the end of October: Top three branches will receive prizes. Offline gifts: All checks and offline gifts received in October will count toward the Branch Challenge. Be sure to download the NALC Donation Allocation Form and mail donations to: Muscular Dystrophy

#### Association; Attn: NALC; P.O. Box 7410354; Chicago, IL 60674-0354. **MDA Muscle Walk**

Join the NALC team on Nov. 9 and/or donate to support the MDA and its mission to transform the lives of people living with neuromuscular dystrophy at mda.donordrive.com/participant/ TeamNALCMuscleWalk.



Foundation Make a donation by sending a check or money order to NALC Disaster Relief Foundation, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, **Washington, DC 20001-2144** or by going to nalc.org/disaster.

National Association Brian L. Renfroe, President



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