



Bylaw basics

Each year, the Committee of Laws rules on approximately 200 submissions from branches and state associations for proposed changes to their bylaws. A majority of the submissions the committee receives is approved, indicating that the proposed changes do not conflict with the *National Association of Letter Carriers Constitution*.

The remainder typically are approved with exceptions, indicating that some of the proposed changes were in conflict with the *Constitution*. In those instances, the committee will explain in a detailed letter to the branch or state association why it ruled the provision to be impermissible. When possible, the committee also suggests how the branch or state association might achieve its objectives without violating the *Constitution*.

As chair of the Committee of Laws, it is my job to review the proposed bylaws and then make a recommendation to the full committee on how we should rule. Vice President George Mignosi and Director of Life Insurance Myra Warren also serve on the Committee of Laws.

In addition to looking at the proposed changes submitted, as chair I will also review the branch's or state association's entire bylaws to see if other provisions are in conflict and need to be amended.

I am often asked by branch and state officers: What is the process for addressing the provisions that are found by the committee to be in conflict? Do we have to go through the entire process again if the language needs to be changed?

The answer is yes: Any proposed change in a branch's or state association's bylaws—whether involving deletion of old language, or addition of new language, or both—constitutes an amendment of the bylaws and would be subject to the requirements of Article 15 of the *NALC Constitution*.

The committee also is asked on occasion to interpret branch or state association bylaws. However, branches and state associations should be aware that the committee is not authorized to interpret branch or state bylaws. Its charter extends only to reviewing proposed bylaws for compliance with the *NALC Constitution*. If the branch or

state association is unsure of the meaning of a bylaw, the branch or state association should vote to clarify the meaning of the bylaw. The committee also hopes that branches and state associations will take care in drafting proposed bylaws to make their meaning as clear as possible, recognizing that the bylaw may be in effect long after its author is available to explain it.

The committee occasionally is asked to provide branches or state associations with copies of its bylaws. We will be happy to review our files upon request to see whether the branch or state association has sent a copy of its bylaws to the committee recently. However, please be advised that the committee does not maintain an updated copy of the bylaws of each branch or state, but rather, pursuant to Article 11, Section 3 of the *NALC Constitution*, only a chronological record of all approved bylaw amendments. It is the duty of each branch and state association to maintain a complete and current set of its bylaws.

If a branch cannot locate its bylaws, the committee recommends that the branch prepare a new set of bylaws, which should be submitted to the Committee of Laws for approval after it has been voted on by the branch following the procedures set forth in Article 15 of the *NALC Constitution*. The *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches*, which is contained in the *NALC Constitution* booklet, is a useful guide for preparing bylaw provisions. State associations should refer to the *Constitution of the Government of State Associations*, also found in the *NALC Constitution*.

The NALC website contains online forms for submitting proposed bylaw changes. These forms can be used only once a proposed bylaw change has been voted on and approved, and the forms must be signed by an officer. The forms were created to make submission of bylaw changes easier for branches and state associations. The forms also assist the committee when it reviews proposed changes.

The *NALC Constitution* can be found on the NALC website. The links to both the online bylaw forms and the *NALC Constitution* can be found at the bottom of the home page (nalc.org). ☒