

NALC bylaw FAQs and Women's History Month



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As chairwoman of the Committee of Laws, my office routinely fields questions concerning bylaws and the *NALC Constitution*. Below are a few:

One question frequently asked is: "What is the process for addressing the provisions that are found by the committee to be in conflict, and 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, 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 approval 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 the 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 they have 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 for the Government of State Associations*, also found in the *NALC Constitution*.

In celebration of Women's History Month

"Mailman" is a common term used. So why not "mailwoman"? To answer that question, one must take a look at postal history. Although women worked in various jobs within the postal system beginning as early as the mid-1800s, it was not until well into the 20th century before it became commonplace to see women wearing the letter carrier uniform.

War opened up opportunities for women. On Nov. 6, 1917, two women were appointed to carry mail on city routes. Despite receiving "highly satisfactory" service marks, they were taken off their routes after two weeks only to be offered "indoor" work. By 1918, there were some limited opportunities for women to become letter carriers, but normally with the understanding that no men were available. As such, many of the early female city letter carriers had to relinquish their positions to their male counterparts returning from war.

A similar scenario was repeated during World War II when women donned the mailbag as letter carriers with most, once again, either surrendering their positions or their positions being terminated as soon as the men returned following the end of the war. Despite women eagerly stepping up during periods of turmoil, demonstrating their capability, attitudes remained largely apathetic toward change. In 1956, only 92 women nationwide served as city carriers.

Real change finally began in the 1960s. On Dec. 14, 1961, President John F. Kennedy created a commission to study barriers women faced in employment policies. As a result of the study, Kennedy directed the chairman of the Civil Service Commission to review pertinent personnel policies and practices affecting the employment of women. He further directed that appointments to federal career service be made without regard to sex, with strict exceptions.

At the 1962 NALC Convention, Resolution No. 76, titled "Oppose Hiring Women," was brought before the delegates. Fortunately, the Executive Council, led at that time by President Doherty, recommended disapproval. When the resolution came before the delegates for action, there were no objections to the Executive Council's recommendation. This shows that although a few men might not have wanted women in the USPS, the delegates at the 1962 convention made it clear: Women were there to stay.

Today, women are a prevalent part of the letter carrier workforce and approximately 30 percent of city carriers are women. Women serve in leadership positions at the branch, state, regional and national levels and are strong advocates for our members. The barriers and stigmas once faced by women seeking employment as letter carriers have long since disappeared.

The term "mailman" still resonates today, due to the prolonged policy once adopted by the postal system to restrict the role of women in the letter carrier workforce. So is it now time to coin the term "mailwoman"? I think not. We are all *letter carriers*.