News from Washington

Protect Our Letter Carriers Act reaches bipartisan majority of co-sponsors in House

In July, the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act (H.R. 1065/S. 463) surpassed a bipartisan majority of co-sponsors in the House of Representatives. As this issue was going to press, the bill had 223 co-sponsors—181 Democratic and 42 Republican.

The bill would deter the violent crimes and assaults committed against letter carriers on the job by appropriating funding for new, secure lock-and-key infrastructure, designating a district attorney in each U.S. judicial district to prioritize cases involving the assault of a letter carrier, and standardizing sentencing guidelines for those found guilty of committing these crimes.

Since surpassing the 218 majority threshold in the House, the bill leads can now use a House procedure called a discharge petition that can force a bill out of committee for a vote on the House floor. NALC is in contact with the bill's leads on the best path forward for the legislation.

While reaching this threshold is a major victory, there is still work to do to increase House co-sponsors and reach a majority of support for the Senate companion bill, which had 14 co-sponsors as this magazine was going to print.

"Letter carriers should be proud of their hard work to reach majority support for this critical legislation in the House," NALC President Brian L. Renfroe said. "Let's keep up the momentum. I urge all letter carriers to contact their representatives and senators so that we can reach a majority of co-sponsors in both chambers."

Visit nalc.org/action to ask your members of Congress to co-sponsor the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act.

Postmaster general testifies in Senate committee hearing

On June 24, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC) held a hearing titled "Reforming the U.S. Postal Service's Broken Business Model."

The committee called Postmaster General David Steiner to testify. This is Steiner's first time testifying before the Senate committee that has oversight of the Postal Service, following participating in a House subcommittee hearing in March.

Chairman Rand Paul (R-KY) began by attacking the Postal Service's financial condition, saying that neither the Postal Service Reform Act (PSRA) of 2022, which shifted $107 billion in financial relief, or the Delivering for America plan has restored the agency's finances. He cited that 80 percent of USPS costs go to labor and criticized the increased employee conversions to career positions. Paul added that without congressional action, USPS could institute a hiring freeze, coupled with an increase in contractors, and could save $1.8 billion in the first year. The chairman also criticized other capital projects, such as vehicle fleet electrification and network modernization, as unjust expenses burdening the agency's finances. Even though the Postal Service is mandated in the U.S. Constitution, Paul concluded by saying that an "honest debate" about the service mandate may be needed.

In his opening remarks, Ranking Member Gary Peters (D-MI) recognized the enduring impact of the Postal Service but also acknowledged the challenges USPS faces. "The Delivering for America plan has not worked. Costs are up. Service is down, and customers are paying the price," he said. Peters mentioned the agency's financial condition and referenced policy changes that NALC has long advocated for—like a better investment strategy for retiree health and pension funds, a fair reallocation of USPS's Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) pension obligations and increasing the agency's borrowing authority—but cautioned that such changes must come with "real transparency, real accountability, and clear service improvement plans" from the Postal Service. He also called for improved employee safety and expressed deep concern about the recent executive order that would affect how the Postal Service handles mail-in ballots.

Steiner used his opening remarks to discuss the mandates on the Postal Service that its private competitors do not face. These include the universal service obligation, pricing structures, limitations on investing retiree health and pension funds, the unfair CSRS pension allocation, the frozen borrowing authority, and the structure of workers' compensation claims.

"To me, the choice for Congress is clear. Either remove the mandates that create the unsustainable business model or compensate the Postal Service for these money-losing mandates," he told the committee. If these mandates are not removed, he suggested Congress should appropriate the public service mandate, which hasn't been done in decades. This mandate dates to 1971, when Congress foresaw some of the services offered by the Postal Service guaranteed to lose money. In response, Congress appropriated $460 million a year to the Postal Service for these mandates, but this stopped in the 1980s.

News from Washington (continued)

Postmaster General Steiner testifies before a Senate committee.

In his questioning, Chairman Paul suggested the agency cut delivery to four or five days, with an option for customers to pay more for six-day delivery despite the PSRA codifying six-day delivery into law. He also asked for details on the agency's hiring freeze and suggested it use a contract workforce. "Reducing labor is the only thing you can do, and contractors do it better. I don't care if you outsource 98 percent of it, and you have no post office, and you're a shell for contracting," he said. He also suggested having only one regulating body for the agency, combining the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) with the USPS Board of Governors (BOG), so that the BOG could set prices.

Both Sens. Ron Johnson (R-WI) and Rick Scott (R-FL) accused the Postal Service of looking for a taxpayer bailout. Once again, Johnson criticized the PSRA's $107 billion financial relief as a taxpayer offload that did not solve the underlying problems. Sen. Scott said increasing the Postal Service's borrowing authority was simply asking taxpayers to cover the debt.

These ill-informed statements do not take the full financial picture into account. From the start, NALC emphasized that provisions in the PSRA were only the first step on the path to financial solvency and that more congressional reforms would be necessary. Similarly, the USPS's borrowing authority is extraordinarily low for an agency of its size and has not been raised in decades.

In a heated exchange, Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO) asked Steiner if he would refuse bonuses. After he failed to clearly answer, Hawley said, "Frankly, if things don't get better, you ought to resign. Because you're not doing your job. You're leaving your good postal workers out there. You're hanging them out to dry. They don't make near what you do. They're working their butts off. They're getting blamed, and you're getting the bonus."

Overall, senators' questions focused on the Postal Service's role in handling mail-in ballots, service, ZIP Codes, the ongoing census pilot, mailing prices, the role of the PRC, and the agency's finances.

"Today's hearing was full of backward and foolish proposals that are insulting to the dedicated, hard work our 200,000 members do every single day," President Renfroe said. "A reduced non-career workforce with service cuts and higher prices is not what's best for letter carriers or every American who depends on our delivery.

"While these are just ideas, even the mention is completely unacceptable and offensive. As we always have, NALC will fight like hell to defend our futures and our service.

"Instead of ideas that would harm letter carriers, service and the entire Postal Service, NALC urges the committee to focus on commonsense financial proposals, such as a better investment strategy for retiree health and pension funds, a fair reallocation of USPS's CSRS pension obligations, and increasing the agency's borrowing authority, which will improve the financial future of USPS and guarantee quality service for years to come."

Paid family and medical leave bill reintroduced in House

On June 11, Reps. Don Beyer (D-VA), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA) reintroduced the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act (H.R. 9261). The bill would provide up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for federal employees, including Postal Service employees.

Employees could use this paid leave for personal illness, to care for a family member, or to take time off work for a family member who is leaving for or returning from active military duty. Federal employees are currently entitled to 12 weeks of leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for such reasons, but it is not guaranteed paid leave.

"I'm proud to represent a district with one of the largest numbers of federal employees in the country, so I am especially conscious of how beneficial it would be to provide comprehensive paid family and medical leave to our public servants," Beyer said.

"When a federal employee faces a serious illness or needs to care for a loved one, the choice should not be between earning a paycheck and being present for their family," Fitzpatrick said.

"Federal workers should no longer be forced to choose between making ends meet or recovering from an illness or caring for a sick loved one. I look forward to working with my colleagues to see this commonsense bill become law," Houlahan said.

The bill has 15 co-sponsors. The bill has been introduced in previous congresses but has not received a floor vote in either chamber. PR