



Protect Our Letter Carriers Act introduced in House

On March 13, the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act (POLCA) (H.R. 7629) was introduced in the House of Representatives by Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Greg Landsman (D-OH). The bill was announced at a press event outside the Capitol in Washington, DC, where NALC President Brian L. Renfro, Reps. Fitzpatrick and Landsman, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), and Reps. Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Donald Norcross (D-NJ) spoke in support of the legislation.

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond and AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department President Greg Regan also spoke at the event, reflecting the large outpouring of support from the labor movement. "Targeted robberies, assaults, and even murder have become part of our job," President Renfro said. "Think about that. Today we are here to send a very clear message: Enough is enough is enough."

"The next step is critical, 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," Renfro said. "We are very grateful for two of our great friends in Congress, Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick and Congressman Greg Landsman, for introducing legislation, the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act."

This bipartisan legislation 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 2025-2029. When key infrastructure is devalued and more secure, 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 the House 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 Renfro said.

Since 2020, there have been more than 2,000 crimes committed against letter carriers on the job. Many of these attacks involve a gun or another weapon. The amount of letter carrier robberies climbed to 643 last year, an increase of nearly 30 percent, and the number of robberies resulting in injuries doubled, according to the United States Postal Inspection Service.

Detroit, MI Branch 1 letter carrier Matt McBee spoke at the press conference about his own experience. "When it happened to me, it was two young men wearing ski masks and holding an AK-47. They stuck it to my head and all they wanted was the key," he said. "I don't want to see any one of my brother or sister carriers going through what I went through. It was a year ago, almost, last July, and I'm still dealing with a lot of mental PTSD."

Cincinnati, OH Branch 43 member Ryan Pierani told the crowd, "I was having lunch and the guy came up and checked the side of my ProMaster and he noticed I was in there and he pulled a gun and it was in my head."

Renfro then told the assembled crowd about Milwaukee, WI Branch 2 letter carrier Andre Cross, who was fatally shot from behind when he tried to escape from two robbers in 2022.

"We can never let this type of violence happen again," Renfro said. Rep. Landsman concurred. "Our letter carriers are such a big part of our lives," he said, "and we have to keep them safe. This bipartisan effort will do just that."

"The rise in robberies and violent assaults being committed against letter carriers in recent years is deeply concerning and Congress must act to ensure their safety," Rep. Fitzpatrick said. "I am proud to be leading this bipartisan effort, which provides necessary resources to protect our dedicated letter

carriers while making sure we are punishing criminals to the fullest extent of the law. The men and women of the Postal Service are often the backbone of a community, and they work hard around the clock, rain or shine, to deliver essential goods, and I will always have their back."

Rep. Norcross, an original co-sponsor on H.R. 7629, said he thinks that this bill will have widespread support, because it is about "one of those common-sense issues."

Renfro called on NALC members to urge their members of Congress to become co-sponsors of H.R. 7629. The goal is to surpass 290 co-sponsors to force the bill to be considered on the House floor.

House Minority Leader Jeffries said that Congress must support the passage of this bill: "We're going to be there with you from the very beginning until we can get this legislation over the finish line. The fact that any worker is subjected to any act of violence while doing a job on behalf of the American people is not something that we should ever tolerate in the United States of America."

Hoyer echoed those sentiments. "This is not a partisan issue. This is about America, not Republicans and Democrats," he said.

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Redmond vowed that labor would support NALC in this cause. "The AFL-CIO consists of 60 national unions and 14 and a half million members. And we all stand in solidarity with you because, the fact of the matter is, every worker in this country has a right to go to work, work safely, and return home to their families safely," he said. "That's a fundamental union principle that we all stand for."

Regan agreed: "We're going to make sure that we have your back."

President Renfro said that passing H.R. 7629 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.



The ERT training attendees and facilitators

NALC trains first Emergency Response Team

NALC held a weeklong training session for the first 29 members of the Emergency Response Team (ERT) March 3-8, as NALC prepares to launch the ERT program.

ERT members are NALC members from around the country who will help other NALC members when they're dealing with trauma. They won't act as counselors, but instead will offer peer-to-peer support with critical events, such as deaths and life-altering injuries. The hope is that they also could be used for situations involving suicide awareness, suicide prevention, mental health issues or substance abuse.

"The members of our union, if given the skills, the knowledge and the opportunity to help other members, they will do that," NALC President Brian L. Renfro said of the initiative at the NALC rap session in November.

The training was held at the Maritime Conference Center in Linthicum Heights, MD, near Baltimore and was led by Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr., Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Mack Julion, Special Assistant to the President Michelle McQuality, and Assistants to the President for Administrative Affairs Chris Henwood, Tamara Twinn and Ed Morgan.

The first three days featured in-depth training by Dr. Jeffrey M. Lating of the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF), a leader in providing training on comprehensive crisis intervention and disaster behavioral health services to emergency responders and other professions. Lating has co-edited and co-authored three books in the areas of stress and post-traumatic stress and has served as a clinical consultant and crisis-management trainer with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other organizations.

Lating is "a professional who comes in and teaches a lot of skills that are necessary to deal with difficult circumstances where people are experiencing trauma," Renfro said.

In the ICISF training, the attendees were given tools, often described as "emotional first aid," to assist people experiencing trauma-related mental health effects. They learned the core elements of a comprehensive, systematic and multicomponent crisis intervention curriculum both for individuals and groups. They left with the knowledge, tools, and techniques necessary to provide crisis support to groups and to recommend follow-up services. Upon completion of the three-day training, the attendees were certified by the ICISF.

In addition, the team members learned about the postal-specific resources for responding to members in crisis, including through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP), the Mutual Benefit Association, the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance, the Federal Employees Retirement System and some of the health plans in the Federal Employees Health Benefits program.

They also were made aware of NALC's plans for the administration of the ERT, how incidents will be reported, and the decision on whom to deploy and to where.

Though ERT members are prepared to help with crisis situations and follow-ups, they do not file grievances, investigate accidents, or represent members with OWCP.

"The first phase after we train them, is that we will utilize them to go help our members in response to what we would call 'critical incidents,'" Renfro said. "The type of things that happen around the country that cause grief, that cause trauma on workroom floors and even outside workroom floors. The type of thing that the Postal Service sends the EAP folks to respond to now."

At the rap session, the president said that the then-recent mass shooting in Lewiston, ME, where an NALC member was killed, would be the kind of situation that NALC's ERT could be called upon to assist with. He said he hoped that peer-to-peer support can be the gateway to getting members who deal with trauma the help that they need.

"This is something that is going to be really beneficial to all of our members," Renfro said.

MDA March Branch Challenge

Time is almost up for the March MDA Challenge. MDA has registered all branches, which means that every branch has its own web page for the 2024 campaign.

Branches can confirm that their branch has been registered at mda.donordrive.com/event/NALC2024. If your branch is not registered, please contact Sabrina Allen of MDA at 312-392-1100 or at nalc@mdausa.org.

For the March campaign, the top 10 NALC fundraising branches will receive recognition at the end of the month. Those branches that raise \$500 or more with an online fundraising campaign will receive special prizes. All checks must be sent with an allocation form to: Muscular Dystrophy Association Inc., Attn: NALC, P.O. Box 7410354, Chicago, IL 60674-0354.

Please remember to send Assistant to the President for Community Services Christina Vela Davidson copies of all items sent to MDA so that branches can receive proper credit for the 2024 campaign. Allocation forms are available on the NALC website at nalc.org/community-service/body/PDF-2023-NALC-Allocation-form-1-1.pdf.

If branches want any events to be shared in the magazine or posted on social media, please send photos and information to Davidson at mda@nalc.org or cdavidson@nalc.org.

The MDA Honor Roll, containing a final listing of all branch MDA contributions for 2023, will be in the April issue of *The Postal Record*.

Heat illness training deadline is April 1

In accordance with the Postal Service's requirements under Article 14 of the National Agreement, the USPS developed a Heat Illness Prevention Program (HIPP) which states city letter carriers must receive an annual training course on heat stress by April 1 each year. This course should discuss the effects of heat on the body, outline the risk factors for heat-related illness, and describe the associated treatments for each. This training should also explain several control measure techniques and safe work practices that can be used to prevent heat-related illness. Letter carriers can review their training records to ensure accuracy by logging into the HERO application via LiteBlue.usps.gov.

National Association of Letter Carriers

100 Indiana Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20001-2144
202-393-4695 | www.nalc.org

Brian L. Renfro, President

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Philip Dine, Director of Communications and Media Relations
Mike Shea, Managing Editor
Rick Hodges, Writer/Editor
Jenessa Wagner, Writer/Editor
Sarah Eccleston, Editorial Assistant

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