

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. Renfro joined National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) President Don Maston and other delegates to the NRLCA national convention who rallied in Reno, NV. President Renfro called on members of the community to report any suspicious activity they see involving letter carriers.

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

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 Renfro said on the day the House bill was announced.

"The next step is critical," Renfro 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.

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.

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 Renfro 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.

Renfro called on NALC members to urge their members of Congress to become co-sponsors of H.R. 7629 and S. 4356.

President Renfro 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.



President Renfro and other city carriers in Reno, NV.

Update on contract negotiations

From President Brian L. Renfro 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.

Congress moving toward discharging 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.



NALC President Renfro encourages the House to vote on the Social Security Fairness Act.

The milestone came on the same day NALC participated in a press conference on Capitol Hill to raise awareness about the issue.

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

"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 Renfro said at the rally.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Instructions on how to enroll or make changes will be mailed to every participant. Participants without computer 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. Renfro said.

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.

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

Table with 4 columns: Enrollment codes, Biweekly employees pay, Monthly annuitants pay. Rows include Self only PSHB High Option, Self plus one PSHB High Option, and Self and family PSHB High Option.

PSHB CDHP premiums

Table with 4 columns: Enrollment codes, Biweekly employees pay, Monthly annuitants pay. Rows include Self only PSHB CDHP, Self plus one PSHB CDHP, and Self and family PSHB CDHP.

For more information, please visit nalc.hbp.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.



Hattiesburg, MS Branch 938 President Sam Hill (c) attends the White House Summit on Extreme Heat.

Decision rendered on national-level LiteBlue hack grievance

On July 12, 2023, President Renfro 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.

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.

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?"

Arbitrator Nolan opined, "The term 'pay' is ambiguous. It could fairly be applied either way. To prevail, however, 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."

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.

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. Renfro 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 contacting 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.

National Association of Letter Carriers

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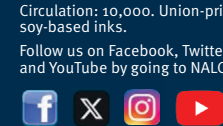
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