



National Association of Letter Carriers

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April 3, 2020

Statement from President Fredric V. Rolando

Re: COVID-19 Virus Crisis

Much has changed in the past week since I last provided an update. Since then, it saddens me to report that two city letter carriers have passed away in New York due to complications from the coronavirus. In total, the Postal Service has lost eight employees to this virus. We send our deepest sympathies and heartfelt prayers to all their families, loved ones, friends and co-workers.

As of this evening, 294 postal employees have been confirmed with the virus, and a total of 4,420 are under quarantine. Of the 4,420 employees under quarantine, 1,275 are under self-quarantine.

The safety and health of letter carriers, and their families, remains of the utmost importance to NALC. We continue to have constant communication with the Postmaster General and other management officials regarding the Postal Service's overall efforts related to the outbreak and specific issues related to letter carriers. Most recently, NALC and the Postal Service agreed upon two more memorandums of understanding (MOUs) regarding COVID-19.

NALC and the Postal Service agreed to implement temporary workplace changes to promote social distancing amongst city letter carriers ([M-01915](#)). The agreement commits the parties to limiting individuals to working only in their employing facilities to the extent possible. The MOU also directs the local parties to immediately discuss potential scheduling and office setup changes such as staggered start times, scheduling letter carriers to begin tours in groups of 10 or less, the manner in which stand-up talks are given, as well as break locations and times, and other initiatives to maximize social distancing. Things that we took for granted in the past suddenly require adaptation. With all the closings of businesses, many carriers may have to return to the office just to use the bathroom. The agreement expires on May 27, 2020, however the parties will revisit this issue immediately prior to that date to determine if an extension is appropriate.

Also on March 30, 2020, NALC and the Postal Service agreed to an MOU ([M-01916](#)) which allows the Postal Service to employ Temporary Carrier Assistants (TCA's) during the period between March 30, 2020, and May 27, 2020, as operationally necessary for the sole purpose of replacing city letter carriers absent due to COVID-19. Recently the Postal Service sent a letter ([M-01914](#)) to its managers and supervisors advising them to allow liberal changes of schedule and approval of leave in recognition of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is inevitable and understandable that letter carriers will need to use leave to care for themselves and their families. Obviously, disruptions in mail service may result. Such service disruptions are necessary not only to protect letter carriers and their families, but to protect the overall general public as well. The ability for the Postal Service to employ TCAs should help minimize these service disruptions. The parties will also revisit this issue immediately prior to the MOU's May 27, 2020, expiration date to determine if an extension is appropriate.

Effective April 1, 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) provides employees with two additional types of leave. First, employees with a qualifying circumstance as defined by the ACT will be eligible for up to 80 hours of paid Emergency Sick Leave, in addition to their sick leave balances. Second, employees who have a minor child whose school or place of care is closed will be eligible for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the majority of which is additional paid leave. These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020, and are in addition to any personal annual and/or sick leave balances that you have.

An employee is entitled to use the additional 80 hours of paid Emergency Sick Leave for absences related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including unable to telework, because the employee:

1. Is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19
2. Has been advised to self-quarantine by a health care provider
3. Is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis
4. Is caring for an individual subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or self-quarantine
5. Is caring for his or her child whose school or place of care is closed or the childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19 related reasons
6. Is experiencing any other substantially similar conditions specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

In regard to qualifying reason 1, in many cities and states, government authorities have issued a quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19. Some local and state governments have also identified groups of people that should self-quarantine, such as individuals over a certain age. While the Postal Service is considered mission critical and not subject to state and local directives, employees that choose to self-quarantine in these circumstances may use up to 80 hours of Emergency Sick Leave to cover their absence.

All career and non-career employees, regardless of tenure, are immediately eligible for up to two weeks of fully or partially paid Emergency Sick Leave. Full-time career employees can receive up to 80 hours of paid Emergency Sick Leave. Part-time career employees can receive Emergency Sick Leave up to the number of hours equal to their average work hours during a 2-week period or the hours they would have worked. Non-career employees can receive Emergency Sick Leave for up to 80 hours based on their average work hours during a 2-week period or the hours they would have worked.

For qualifying reasons 1, 2, and 3, the Emergency Sick Leave is 100% of the letter carrier's pay, but capped at \$511 per day and \$5,110 total. For qualifying reasons 4, 5, and 6 the Emergency Sick Leave will be no less than 2/3 of the letter carrier's pay, but capped at \$200 per day and \$2,000 total.

With regard to the other type of additional leave, the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion, an employee is entitled to take leave related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including telework, because the employee is caring for his or her child whose school or place of care is closed or the childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19 related reasons. This qualifying reason is the same as qualifying reason number 5 for Emergency Sick Leave.

All employees that have been employed for 30 days or longer are eligible for this benefit if they meet the qualifying reason. This new qualifying reason does not add to the 12 weeks of FMLA already provided for in the law. When using this new qualifying reason, the first 10 days of the 12-week FMLA coverage will be unpaid. To receive pay for the first 10 days, an employee can choose to use their own earned leave or may use the 80 hours Emergency Sick Leave explained above. The remaining 10 weeks of FMLA leave for this qualifying reason will be paid leave. This leave is required to be paid out at no less than 2/3 of the letter carriers pay, but capped at \$200 per day and \$10,000 total.

The Postal Service states it is working on implementing these new leave requirements and will be disseminating additional corporate wide communications in the coming days, including how this leave is to be managed and tracked within the Time and Attendance Collection System (TACS).

Again, the [two new types of leave](#) identified above are in addition to the contractual benefits to which USPS employees are otherwise entitled. I previously reported on some recent MOUs in my March 18, 2020, statement found on the COVID-19 page on the NALC website, in which NALC and the Postal Service agreed to address obvious concerns such as childcare needs caused by the large number of schools and daycares that have closed, and the need for city carrier assistants to have additional paid leave to use during this unprecedented crisis. [M-01910](#) allows career letter carriers to use sick leave for dependent care to care for a child as the result of a closed daycare, school or the unavailability of the child's primary caregiver. [M-01911](#) gives city carrier assistants an additional 80 hours of paid leave to use for specific reasons in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, since CCAs do not earn sick leave. Both of these MOUs expire on May 27, 2020, however the national parties will revisit these issues immediately prior to that date to determine if an extension is appropriate.

Recently the Postal Service released a revised document directing its supervisors and managers how to make decisions regarding steps to take and what type of leave should be afforded to employees who have had certain forms of exposure (or potential exposure) to COVID-19 or who have travelled to certain countries or by way of a cruise ship. The guidance is offered for employees who fall into one of the following six categories:

1. An employee who tests positive for COVID-19
2. An employee who develops a fever and symptoms such as a cough or difficulty breathing
3. An employee who has visited certain countries or travelled on a cruise ship in the past 14 days

4. An employee who shares a household with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19
5. An employee who has been exposed, outside of work, to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19
6. An employee who has been exposed to an individual who was exposed to an individual who tested positive for COVID-19

When an employee tests positive for COVID-19, they should be placed on the Emergency Sick Leave provided by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). Again this leave is above and beyond the leave letter carriers normally earn, and it is afforded to all employees, whether career or non-career, and without regard to length of employment. When an employee develops a fever and symptoms such as a cough or difficulty breathing, they should also be sent home and placed on the Emergency Sick Leave provided by the FFCRA. After an employee returns from travel on a cruise ship or from a level 3 country, they should stay home for 14 days and be also paid Emergency Sick Leave as provided by the Act. If that employee later shows symptoms of COVID-19, and has exhausted the Emergency Sick Leave, they must remain at home on normal sick leave or annual leave until they are cleared to return to work.

If an employee shares a household with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, they should stay home and be afforded Emergency Sick Leave as provided by the Act. Employees in this situation should stay at home until the household member has had no fever for at least 72 hours (at least 3 full days of no fever w/o the use of any fever-reducing medications) AND other symptoms have improved (for example, when cough or shortness of breath has improved) AND at least 7 days have passed since COVID-19 symptoms first appeared.

If an employee has been exposed, outside of work, to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, then the District or Area Occupational Health Nurse Administrator (OHNA) should contact the Local Health Department for advice. If the Local Health Department reviews the circumstances and orders the employee to quarantine, then he or she should be afforded up to 80 hours of Emergency Sick Leave in accordance with the Act. If the Local Health Department reviews the circumstances and does not order the employee to quarantine, then he or she can return to work. If the Local Health Department does not perform the review as requested, then the OHNA will make the determination whether to quarantine the employee or not.

If an employee has been exposed to an individual who was exposed to an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, then he or she will be cleared to work. USPS states that according to CDC guidelines, people in this situation are not considered exposed.

The guidelines issued by the Postal Service have been given to supervisors and managers so they know what to do in those certain situations. If you believe you may have been exposed to COVID-19, and such exposure does not necessarily "fit" into one of the above categories to be quarantined, you may self-quarantine. Or if you are concerned that you may be exposed to someone at work who you think should be quarantined, you may self-quarantine. If you call and share your concerns with your doctor, and your doctor advises you to self-quarantine, you can use the 80 hours Emergency Sick Leave provided by the Act. Or, if there is a state or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19 in effect where you live, you may also use the 80 hours Emergency Sick Leave to self-quarantine. And in any case, you can always use your own leave to self-quarantine. In the event you are contacted by a local public health official and identified as someone who may have had contact with an individual who has tested positive for coronavirus, please immediately inform your supervisor and local NALC branch officer as a means to protect your coworkers and community.

I am continuing to ask that letter carriers communicate with their NALC branch officers or national business agent if they see problems in their office with lack of cleaning, shortage of sanitizing supplies, standup talks not being conducted, social distancing not being practiced, quarantine protocols not being followed, or any instruction that conflicts with the guidance being provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We have been successful getting many of these issues resolved, but we need to know where the problems are so we can get them fixed. We communicate daily with USPS officials regarding these issues, and we are committed to doing our part to correct each issue as it arises.

USPS has committed to provide daily supplies necessary for postal employees to clean frequently touched items in the office as well as provide necessary supplies for letter carriers to use to clean steering wheels and other frequently touched surfaces in postal vehicles. They have also committed to provide supplies for use while on the street, such as hand sanitizer, as well as cleaning supplies to maintain cleanliness on surfaces in the vehicle and on other surfaces we encounter on the street. You should have sufficient hand sanitizer to keep your hands clean all day as you touch the many surfaces on your route. They have also committed to provide masks and nitrile gloves for any employee that requests them. It is my understanding that the large shipments of supplies USPS received on March 23rd and March 25th at its central distribution warehouse in Topeka, KS are now being received in delivery units throughout the country. If your manager or supervisor tells you that supplies are backordered, please ask them if they ordered directly from the USPS facility in Topeka. USPS has informed us that they now have a significant amount of supplies on hand at this facility and are distributing them. If orders are placed through vendors rather than directly from Topeka, they will likely be backordered.

In my March 25, 2020, statement found on the COVID-19 page on the NALC website, I discussed what letter carriers should do locally regarding such unsafe conditions. Please refer to that statement for an in depth explanation of how to report such conditions, as well as management's responsibility to correct them. If you are told by your supervisor to work in an unsafe environment, either in the office, in the vehicle, or on the street, please inform your local union representative, branch president, or NBA immediately.

USPS headquarters continues to distribute mandatory stand-up talks related to COVID-19 which should be given in every post office across the nation. These standup talks are posted on the safety and health and COVID-19 pages of NALC's website. If you see standup talks which have not been given, please tell a union representative about this as well.

I want to remind everyone again that NALC worked with USPS to establish alternate delivery instructions to eliminate customer contact for mail that requires customer signatures. As a result, USPS temporarily modified customer signature capture procedures for the Mobile Delivery Device (MDD) sign-on-glass feature, PS Form 3811 (Domestic Return Receipt), PS Form 3849 (We ReDeliver for You), and any hard-copy receipt items usually signed by customers. The new process is outlined in my March 25, 2020, statement as well on the NALC website on the COVID-19 page.

NALC has always been committed to providing the necessary resources for our members and union representatives. To provide letter carriers with as much information as possible related to the pandemic, NALC created and keeps updated a "COVID-19" page under "News & Research" on the NALC website. Here you will find:

- My weekly statements
- Links to the podcasts in which Executive Vice President Renfro delivers regular updates on COVID-19
- New memorandums of understanding in effect during the pandemic
- All the mandatory standup talks which should have been given in your office
- Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Information from USPS
- Recently created COVID19@nalc.org resource

In addition to contacting your shop steward, branch officer or NBA, NALC has a new resource for members to ask any questions about the COVID-19 pandemic: COVID19@nalc.org. Many NALC members have used this new resource.

Again, if you do not have the supplies you need to keep yourself safe, please contact a branch officer or your NBA to let them know, but you can also use this new email address to voice your concerns. In addition to using this new resource to ask questions, please use it to report COVID-19 related issues in your facility when you do not have immediate access to a steward or branch officer, and you are unable to contact your NBA office. Please be sure to include your name and NALC branch number in your email. Having this information upfront allows NALC headquarters to quickly connect members with the information they need.

We recently announced the postponement of the 28th annual Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger® Food Drive, scheduled for May 9, 2020. The annual success of the food drive is largely due to the efforts of letter carriers, other postal employees, postal customers, community volunteers and many more. Their safety is of paramount importance. Much of the United States is currently under shelter in place or similar advisories due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and public health authorities such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have issued guidelines that include social distancing. While it is unknown how long these guidelines will remain in place, it is highly unlikely that those involved in the food drive will be able to safely participate just six weeks from now. NALC, as well as our national partners, are fully committed to rescheduling the food drive later in 2020. Although a new date has not yet been scheduled, we look forward to once again holding the largest one-day food drive in America when it is safe to do so.

As you probably know, on Sept. 20, 2019, negotiations for a new collective-bargaining agreement between NALC and USPS came to an impasse. At that point the parties entered a mandatory 60-day mediation period as required by statute. The parties also used the mediation period to continue negotiations while simultaneously attempting to agree on a neutral arbitrator in the event the parties remained at impasse after the 60-day period.

In early February, after unsuccessfully coming to terms on a new contract, Arbitrator Dennis R. Nolan was selected as the neutral chair of a three-person arbitration board to be responsible for resolving the bargaining impasse between NALC and the Postal Service. Afterwards, several dates were agreed upon for both sides to present their positions before the arbitration panel which will ultimately render a final and binding decision on the contents of a new national agreement.

Major issues are at stake, and we still have many unresolved differences regarding both economic, operational and workplace provisions. Considering the current disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, NALC is exploring the idea of an extension to our current contract and/or postponing the scheduled interest arbitration. Any decision to postpone our interest arbitration or extend the current contract will not be made in haste. Our collective bargaining goals have not changed, and ultimately, we will do what gives us the best opportunity to accomplish those goals for letter carriers. In the meantime, our current collective-bargaining agreement remains in force pending final resolution of the parties' dispute.

Additionally, NALC's National Convention is scheduled to be held August 17-21, 2020. We have received many questions regarding its status. As the country watches event after event either being postponed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no guarantee that our convention will take place as scheduled. While the NALC Executive Council is currently not postponing or cancelling our

national convention, we are doing our due diligence and communicating with the convention center and convention hotels to explore our options in the event such a decision must be made. The national convention includes complicated logistics for both headquarters and branches. If we reach the point where it is obvious holding the convention safely is not possible, that information will be immediately communicated to the branches.

We continue to remain very involved with our congressional representative with regard to proposed provisions for stimulus packages related to the COVID-19 virus. As plans for the next stimulus package are being developed, we are again pursuing appropriations to keep the Postal Service healthy through the crisis. Additionally, we want to be sure that we are included in any hazard pay provisions for front line workers.

On another stimulus note, The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) signed into law on March 27, 2020, provides for “economic impact payments” to virtually all Americans, including active and retired letter carriers. These payments -- \$1,200 for individuals and \$2,400 for married couples plus \$500 for dependent children under age 18 -- are often called stimulus checks because they are part of a \$2.2 trillion package of measures to stimulate the economy and extend unemployment insurance benefits. The package was enacted in response to the sharp downturn in the economy caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

The payments will be distributed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in about three weeks, though the IRS may need several months to distribute all the payments.

The IRS intends to distribute most of the payments through electronic fund transfers directly to taxpayers’ bank accounts, using the bank account information provided on households’ 2018 or 2019 tax returns. For those, who filed paper returns or for whom the IRS does not have bank account information, payments will be sent by mail. However, the IRS announced that it is setting up a website where individuals can provide bank account information to get the payments transferred electronically.

There are two important details that might be relevant in some instances.

First, the payments will be reduced for households with higher incomes – for individuals with adjusted gross incomes of more than \$75,000 in the 2018 or 2019 tax years – or \$150,000 in the case of married couples. The payments will be reduced by \$5 for every \$100 of income over the thresholds.

Second, Americans who did not file a tax return in 2018 or 2019 will have to file a special form to qualify for the economic impact payments, but not if they receive Social Security benefits – the IRS will get their bank information or address from the Social Security Administration.

Like I said at the beginning of this statement, much has changed and the changes continue to come quickly – daily, if not hourly. NALC strives to provide letter carriers with the most current information possible, and we will continue to do so as we navigate working through this pandemic together. Please continue following the CDC’s recommendations, and please do everything you can to protect yourself, your family, your coworkers, and your customers.

The Postal Service is part of the critical infrastructure of this nation. We provide an essential public service of the federal government for the American people, and during this crisis, that service becomes even more important. We are the only universal delivery and communications network servicing every home and business every day, and our customers will need us now more than ever to deliver prescriptions, additional on-line purchases, test kits, coronavirus updates, the list goes on, and likely for this year’s elections. Letter Carriers in every neighborhood are a source of comfort, and a welcome sign of normalcy to the American people. That has been true during recoveries from hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, and other disasters in the past, and is now true as we all cope with the current national crisis.

Once again, if you have any questions or issues to report, please contact a branch officer or your national business agent, or use the COVID19@nalc.org email address.

In closing, thank you for your dedicated service to your customers and each other. You are all heroes, and I and all the NALC employees are proud to work for you.

Please be safe, and goodnight.