

## Updates



**Dan Toth**

**T**he Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO) were first enacted in 1983, more than 40 years ago. These Social Security Administration (SSA) provisions negatively affected employees with a Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) component, by unfairly reducing their and their survivor's SSA benefits.

Fortunately, the 118th Congress passed the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023 in the House and the Senate, and it was signed into law by President Biden on Jan. 5, 2025.

This law repeals the WEP and GPO effective Jan. 1, 2024. It has taken decades of hard work by letter carriers and their families at the branch, state, regional and national levels. Repealing the WEP and GPO is a huge achievement, and everyone should take a moment to appreciate the dedication that went into this legislation.

Due to the retroactive nature of the law, SSA will owe affected beneficiaries for any reductions to benefits made in 2024 through the time it takes to implement the unreduced benefit amount. Updates from SSA can be found at [ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/social-security-fairness-act.html](https://ssa.gov/benefits/retirement/social-security-fairness-act.html) or by using the QR code. The Jan. 24, 2025, update explains:



SSA is finalizing its plan to implement the Act while limiting negative effects on our regular workloads and services to the public. We cannot yet provide an estimated timeframe for when we will adjust a person's past or future benefits, but we will continue to provide updates on this webpage. We thank the public for its patience.

**Federal Retirement Fairness Act:** Unfortunately, one vital piece of legislation still requires some work to get it passed into law. This is the Federal Retirement Fairness Act, which would allow Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) carriers credit for periods of non-deduction service (e.g., transitional employees and city carrier assistants) performed after 1988. This bill would affect a majority of active city carriers and is an important step toward recognizing the contributions of non-career service.

**Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act:** Although it is not directly related to retirement, I also oversee our network of regional workers' compensation assistants, who are available to help members with the complex issues surrounding on-the-job injuries. A major problem we face in the field is the lack of physicians able and willing to provide care for those with a federal workers compensation claim. The Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act would expand the role of nurse practitioners and physician assistants in providing services to injured federal workers. Currently the law limits these activities to physicians, and if passed, this bill would make it easier for injured employees to seek treatment and receive medical rationales necessary for claim adjudication.

These last two bills have not been reintroduced into the 119th Congress at this time. For updates, be sure to follow the Government Affairs section on the NALC website, read the *NALC Bulletin* and *The Postal Record*, and follow NALC on social media.

**Equal COLA:** The Equal COLA Act aims to correct the partial cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) that FERS retirees receive. Under current law, FERS retirees receive a reduced COLA compared to CSRS retirees. FERS COLAs are reduced by up to 1 percent, while there is no reduction to CSRS COLAs. These reductions make a big difference to those on a fixed income, especially as these reductions compound year after year. This bill has been reintroduced as H.R. 491.

**Early-outs and incentives:** Another retirement update relates to voluntary early retirement and incentives to retire. Recently both the American Postal Workers Union and the National Postal Mail Handlers Union reached agreements with the Postal Service on a one-time retirement incentive of \$15,000 and an early-out for eligible employees. There has not been any discussion between the NALC and the Postal Service for a similar agreement, nor is one expected in the near future. In my opinion, this is simply because the Postal Service can't downsize the city carrier craft and still get the mail delivered. Early-outs and incentives typically only come when the retiring workforce can either be replaced or downsized.

**Our retirement benefits are derived through the law and** are therefore affected by our legislators. Whether we are active or retired, we must remain engaged in the politics that affect our retirement wallets. Letter carriers deserve to retire with a modest safety net after decades of physical labor for their country and government.