

THE COVID CRISIS IS FAR FROM OVER

Paul V. Hogrogian, National President



Dear Members:
With the year 2021 just beginning, already the NPMHU has been aggressively representing Mail Handlers across the country.

On Christmas Eve, the NPMHU and the USPS finalized a historic MOU that provided for additional Mail Handler staffing in 183 installations. As set forth in more detail in the MOU, the Postal Service has agreed to convert 5,291 MHAs to career status in these 183 installations by March 13, 2021. The number of conversions will vary by installation based on the Postal Service's determination. The Postal Service also has committed to creating 5,291 Mail Handler positions in the listed installations. In exchange, any facility not included among the 183 listed installations was required to separate all Peak MHA hires (MHAs hired for reasons unrelated to COVID-19) necessary to comply with the 24.5% MHA installation cap no later than January 22, 2021. In addition, any facilities that were included in the MOU converting five or fewer MHAs would also come into compliance with the 24.5% cap by January 22, 2021, except these facilities could maintain extra Peak MHAs equal to their number of conversions (from 1-5) until March 27, 2021. Those listed installations converting more than five MHAs must separate any non-COVID related Peak MHAs on or before March 27, 2021. In all situations, the separation of any Peak MHA will follow the procedures of the National Agreement. MHAs fired in excess of the 24.5% installation

cap for COVID-related reasons remain subject to a separate MOU.

The bottom line is that the Postal Service has been granted short extensions for Peak MHAs, during a time when the pandemic continues and COVID-related MHAs are being utilized, and in return the NPMHU has been guaranteed at least 5,291 MHA conversions to full-time career status by March 13, 2021. The National Office and the National Executive Board concluded that this MOU presented an opportunity to increase Mail Handler craft staffing and provide career employment for more than 5,000 MHAs, while maintaining the Postal Service's flexibility during the COVID-19 crisis.

The 5,291 conversions are in addition to those MHAs converted to career status resulting from application of the Residual Vacancy MOU. The NPMHU will continue its efforts to convert more MHAs and include more installations under this new MOU. Also, nothing in this MOU precludes Local Unions from pursuing increased staffing and additional MHA conversions through the grievance-arbitration procedure.

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The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a devastating effect on the Postal Service and all postal employees. Mail Handlers and postal workers from around the country continue to courageously perform essential federal service under the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The latest numbers reflect that there are approximately 5,800 postal employees who are infected with another approximately 4,000 in quarantine. Since the onset of the pandemic, approximately 3,700 Mail Handlers have tested positive for the COVID virus. The number of COVID related deaths of postal employees is at least 160 (including at least 17 Mail Handlers).

Although a vaccine is becoming available on a limited basis, the COVID crisis is far from over. We cannot fall victim to "COVID Fatigue." We cannot allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security. We must remain vigilant and continue to protect ourselves and our co-workers. We must continue to follow the protocols put in place, especially those concerning social distancing and the wearing of face coverings and masks.

Please contact your Union representatives if your facility is not following any of these protocols (Face Coverings, Supplies, Social Distancing, Stand-Up Talks, Cleanings, etc.).

NPMHU representatives at the National, Regional, and Local levels continue to meet on a regular basis with their counterparts in postal management to discuss the Postal Service's response to the outbreak of the virus and to ensure that the proper protocols are in place during ever-changing circumstances. The NPMHU, as well as the APWU, NALC, and NRLCA, continue to have discussions with senior Postal Management to implement a "temperature taking" process in postal installations. Details such as

procedures when an employee exceeds that threshold, return to work protocols, and protections for privacy concerns are still being finalized. Discussions are also taking place regarding which installations will implement “temperature taking” procedures. Finalizing these details has become more complicated than expected, but we anticipate reaching an agreement soon.

Discussions with the Postal Service are also taking place regarding making COVID-19 testing available for postal employees at postal facilities. The NPMHU believes that this would be a positive step in ensuring that Mail

workers, be protected and be given such priority access to the vaccine.

The NPMHU reached agreement with the Postal Service to further extend several Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and policy statements until March 26, 2021. These MOUs provide protections for Mail Handlers in the form of Liberal Leave while ensuring for proper Mail Handler staffing in all postal installations.

The MOU on the Temporary MHA Exception Period contains a provision that protects the rights of those Mail Handlers who have signed the Overtime Desired List. “The MHAs will

status provided that the need for reappointment arises within twenty-four (24) months of separation.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) expired on December 31, 2020. This means that the 80 hours of Emergency Sick Leave (ESL) provided by the Act is no longer available to postal employees. Instead of stepping up and providing more protection to its employees during the pandemic, the Postal Service has taken the opposite approach. While the Postal Service will continue to grant Administrative Leave to those employees who are quarantined due to “close contact” while at work, they will now force employees who quarantine due to “close contact” outside of work to use their own leave. This short-sighted reversal of policy will only put all postal employees at risk. Faced with the possibility of loss of pay, many employees who by all medical logic should be in quarantine, will now report to work and possibly infecting their co-workers. The NPMHU urges the Postal Service to reverse this ill-advised decision and do the right thing. The NPMHU is also working with the new Congress, advocating that the Emergency Sick Leave provisions of the FFCRA be restored.

I remain confident that through the work of our Contract Administration Department and our legal representatives, and through the hard work of our Regional, Local, and Branch representatives, we can successfully meet all challenges that lie before us.

In these and other endeavors, the continuing support of all Mail Handlers is very much appreciated.

Fraternally,



Paul V. Hogrogian
National President

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Handlers and all postal workers are protected from the COVID-19 pandemic. More details will be provided as these discussions progress.

The NPMHU is also demanding that Mail Handlers and other postal employees be given priority access to the vaccine once it becomes available. Mail Handlers have been designated as employees providing essential services of the federal government. The NPMHU is also urging that the Postal Service make vaccinations available in many of the larger postal facilities. Mail Handlers have been heroically reporting to work every day, putting their own health at risk, to perform these essential federal services. Fairness dictates that Mail Handlers, as essential

not be used to the detriment of Mail Handlers on the Overtime Desired List.” This generally means that in those installations where temporary MHAs are hired in excess of the contractual MHA cap, the Overtime Desired List(s) should be maximized (12 hours per day/7 days per week).

The Liberal Leave Letter provides that “Leave taken for COVID-19 related reasons ... may not be cited in discipline for failing to maintain an assigned schedule.”

The NPMHU and USPS also agreed to another MOU which extended reappointment opportunities for those MHAs who were hired between March 26, 2020 and December 31, 2020 and were separated for lack of work. These MHAs now have priority reappointment