

THE TRIFECTA—NATIONAL BARGAINING, POSTAL REFORM AND CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC

Paul V. Hogrogian, National President



Dear Members:

Our National Agreement expires on September 20, 2022. A solicitation for contract proposals was sent to the field late last year. Hundreds of contract proposals have now been received at National Headquarters. Proposals generated by mail handlers from around the country are an important aspect in preparing for bargaining. I want to thank each and every Mail Handler who submitted a proposal for participating in our process to achieve a fair contract.

A bargaining strategy session was held on the third day of our Semi-Annual Meeting of Local Unions (SAMLU) held in Washington, DC, on November 15-17, 2021. Mail Handler representatives from throughout the country discussed the priorities for these negotiations. Our Field Negotiating Committee met in Washington, DC, for five days from February 7 to 11, 2022, to thoroughly review, analyze, discuss, debate and evaluate the over 800 proposals that were received from the field and to formulate proposals of its own (see related articles in this magazine). The Committee provided its recommendations, which will now be sent to the National Bargaining Team for their analysis and consideration.

Our priorities in bargaining include fair and just general wage increases, continuation of our current Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs), keeping the No Lay-Off clause, improving the rights and benefits for our MHAs, returning subcontracted work to the Mail Handler Craft, putting a stop to future subcontracting, minimizing the dislocation and inconvenience to Mail Handlers subject to involuntary reassignments, and most importantly, fixing the badly broken wage scale which hinders the recruitment and retention of new Mail Handler employees. It is time for the Postal Service to stand up and justly compensate all Mail Handlers for the hard work and dedication that they have demonstrated throughout the two years of the pandemic. Talk is cheap, now is the time for action.

This is not a particularly opportune time during which to bargain. The Postal Service's financial situation and the continuing decline in mail volume (especially First-Class Mail) lead us to believe that these negotiations will be extremely difficult. The NPMHU bargaining team is up to the task at hand and will work tirelessly to achieve a fair contract

for all Mail Handlers. The NPMHU will routinely and frequently keep the membership informed of the progress of these negotiations.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse effect on the Postal Service and all postal employees since March of 2020. Mail Handlers and postal workers from around the country courageously performed essential federal service under the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic often putting their own health at risk.

The NPMHU has spent the last two years dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports issued by the USPS in late January and early February of 2022 showed an all-time high of over 18,600 infected postal employees. However, recent reports released in March show that the COVID numbers are decreasing substantially. The latest reports reflect that there are approximately 4,100 postal employees who are infected with another approximately 440 in quarantine.

The decline in COVID cases can be attributed to the fact that COVID tests and vaccines are now easily available. It should be noted that the CDC has reported that 97% of all COVID related hospitalizations and deaths are due to the unvaccinated. This emphasizes the importance of getting the shots. If you have not already done so, please get the vaccine at your earliest opportunity. The sooner everybody is vaccinated, the sooner we can get back to a sense of normalcy and put COVID behind us.

The NPMHU also reached agreement with the Postal Service to further extend the following Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and policy statements until April 8, 2022:

1. Sick Leave for Dependent Care (Child Care)
2. Liberal Leave Policy
3. MHA Leave
4. Temporary MHA Exception Period
5. Temporary Extension on Step 3 and Arbitration Appeals

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 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 (up to 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 under ELM 511.43."

As stated, these MOUs are set to expire on April 8, 2022. Absent another variant emerging, I do not foresee the MOUs being extended. We are also in discussions with the Postal Service regarding modification of the mask wearing policy to conform with CDC recommendations and current conditions

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senior postal officials and
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comprehensive postal reform bill.
The bi-partisan Postal Reform
Service Act, H.R. 3076, was
introduced in Congress earlier
this year.**

Our Regional Directors have been in constant contact with their counterparts in the Postal Area Offices to discuss COVID-19 issues throughout the pandemic. Our Regional representatives have been extremely successful in rectifying problems brought to their attention. I want to thank them for a job well done.

Meanwhile, the USPS has contracted with the Biden Administration to deliver 500 million COVID-19 Test Kits to every household in America. To facilitate the federal government's efforts to deliver at-home COVID-19 test kits to all Americans, the Postal Service has established

43 fulfillment centers. As part of the contract, the 500 million Test Kits will be packed and labeled in the 43 facilities, which are identified as fulfillment centers in the agreement. The NPMHU and USPS have negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding which establishes guidelines regarding the staffing of the fulfillment centers. The parties have agreed to extend the exception period for the hiring and continued employment of MHAs in excess of the 24.5% installation cap (up to the number listed in the agreement) in the identified installations. These MHAs, identified as being utilized for the pilot, will be used solely for the purpose of performing the work of the pilot except for a three-week implementation period which began on January 1, 2022. The duration of the pilot will be seventy-five days from January 12, 2022, unless extended by mutual agreement of the parties.

This pilot provides Mail Handlers with the opportunity to perform an essential public health service to every American in our battle against the coronavirus pandemic. Mail Handlers are proud to be a part of these critical efforts.

The four major postal unions, senior postal officials and many of the major mailers have been working together on a comprehensive postal reform bill. The bi-partisan Postal Reform Service Act, H.R. 3076, was introduced in Congress earlier this year. The bill was overwhelmingly passed in a recent vote by the House in February 2022 by a vote of 341-92, with 120 Republicans voting in favor. The Senate also voted on the bill in early March where it passed by a vote of 79-19, with 29 Republicans voting in favor. This is certainly a major victory for the Postal Service, postal workers, and the American public. This bill puts the USPS on a much stronger path towards financial stability. Please refer to Legislative/Political Director Katie Maddocks' article in this magazine for more details on Postal Reform.

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.

Fraternally,



Paul V. Hogrogian
National President