

## TWO YEARS LATER, THE PANDEMIC IS STILL WITH US

Paul V. Hogrogian, National President



Dear Members:

For many years, the NPMHU had assurances from senior postal management that the closing and consolidations of mail processing facilities would be paused pending the enactment of Postal Reform legislation. However, given the current state of postal finances, the projection of continuing decline in mail volumes, and the uncertainty of meaningful postal reform legislation being enacted, the Postmaster General and the Board of Governors recently included the consolidation of mail processing operations in certain installations in their 10-year strategic plan.

The Postal Service notified the NPMHU on April 27, 2021 regarding their planned implementation of secondary mail moves for 18 mail processing facilities. These 18 sites previously had AMP studies conducted and most of the mail has already been moved in 2015 or before as part of Phase II of the USPS Network Consolidation Program. Twenty-four facilities underwent partial consolidations in 2015. The Postal Service notified the NPMHU that four of the facilities will have no further action taken at this time and two other facilities were “tabled” and will be reevaluated for possible future action.

The secondary mail moves that are planned include destinating flats or letters, and in some facilities, both. Of those 18 facilities, there are 10 where mail handlers are currently working. These include Bend, Oregon; Erie, Pennsylvania; Gainesville, Florida; Huntsville, Alabama; Mid-Hudson, NY; North Bay, California; Seattle DDC; Southern Connecticut; and Wausau, Wisconsin. These installations are not proposed to be closed entirely as parcel processing, cross dock and other operations are slated to remain. The exact number of Mail Handlers to be impacted is now becoming known as Impact Statements and supporting documentation continue to be issued. Many of these sites have decided not to excess any Mail Handlers out of their installations. To date only two installations (Erie and Seattle DDC) have issued impact statements proposing Mail Handlers be involuntarily reassigned. Final implementation is planned to occur in November, but this is subject to change. The NPMHU has taken the position that these actions are improper since they rely on data from AMP studies conducted in 2010 and that before any Mail Handler is involuntarily reassigned, new AMP studies should be conducted.

The Postal Service also notified the Union of its plans to refresh AMP feasibility studies for 31 of the remaining 38 candidate sites from Phase II of the USPS Network Consolidation Program. The AMP studies for these 38 facilities were placed on hold in 2015. The Postal Service has also decided to “table” the AMP studies for 12 of these sites. The Postal Service has now decided to refresh AMP studies in 19 of the original sites. Of the 19, the Postal Service believes that the studies will support full consolidations in 12 of the sites and in another 7 sites the Postal Service believes the studies will support “mail moves,” but not complete consolidations.

As with the 18 sites previously discussed, these installations are not proposed to be closed entirely, as parcel processing, cross dock and other operations are slated to remain. There is no firm move date as the parties continue to discuss possibly tabling the remaining sites.

The NPMHU will continue to challenge unnecessary consolidations to minimize any negative impact on mail handlers. If the Postal Service decides to go forward with these AMPs, they will have to use updated data and conduct public hearings before implementing any closure or consolidation of any mail processing facilities.

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The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an adverse 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 NPMHU has spent the last 21 months dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent reports released in November show that the COVID numbers are somewhat stabilizing. The reports reflect that there are over 4,000 postal employees who are infected with another approximately 880 in quarantine. Due to a spike in COVID numbers in July and August, the USPS reinstated its mask policy where social distancing cannot be maintained.

Although a vaccine is now easily available, the COVID crisis is far from over. We must continue to follow the protocols put

in place. It should be noted that the CDC has reported that 97% of all COVID related hospitalizations and deaths involve individuals who are not vaccinated. We are now also facing the threat of the new Omicron variant. This emphasizes the importance of getting vaccinated. 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.

President Biden announced a policy whereby all employers of over 100 employees must mandate a vaccine policy or in the alternative to mandate weekly COVID testing. On November 4, 2021, OSHA issued its guidelines regarding the implementation of this policy. The OSHA guidelines calls for employers of over 100 employees (including the Postal Service) to implement and enforce a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy requiring employees to choose either to be vaccinated or undergo regular (at least weekly) COVID-19 testing and wear a face covering at work. The guidelines also require employers to provide paid time to workers to get vaccinated and to allow for paid leave to recover from any side effects caused by the vaccination. The guidelines also call for employers to determine the vaccination status of each employee, obtain acceptable proof of employee vaccination, and maintain a roster of each employee's vaccination status. The policy does not call for the employer to pay for testing. The effective date of this policy is January 4, 2022. The NPMHU will be negotiating with the Postal Service over the implementation of this policy.

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The four major postal unions, senior postal officials, and many of the major mailers continue to work together on a comprehensive postal reform bill. A version of this bill was introduced in Congress earlier this year. The bill was approved by the House Oversight and Reform Committee on a voice vote and has moved on to the Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce Committees. A companion bill was introduced in the Senate. If passed, this bill will put the USPS on a much stronger path towards financial stability. Please

refer to Legislative/Political Director Katie Maddock's article in this magazine for more details on Postal Reform.

Another matter that we must keep an extremely close eye on is that of raising the debt ceiling. While Congress has temporarily raised the debt ceiling in September, it is set to expire in December. Should the debt ceiling not be permanently raised, there is a strong possibility that the Postal Service would not have access to its money and therefore not be able to meet payroll and possibly suspend its operations. The NPMHU legislative and political department is reaching out to key members of Congress to discuss the urgency of this matter.

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Our National Agreement expires on September 20, 2022. Solicitation for contract proposals have been sent to the field. 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. Our Field Negotiating Committee is scheduled to meet in Washington for a week to review and discuss all the proposals that are received from the field. Our bargaining kick-off with the Postal Service is scheduled for June 2022. Regular updates concerning the progress of the negotiations will be provided to the Local Unions and to the membership.

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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

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