

MEMO

To the Branch 2184 Leadership Council, April 13, 2021



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Scott Watts
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Felicia Davis
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Yvonne Jackson
Karl Tamburro
Denise Viola
Lillian Bogosian
Phil Ashford
Scherrie Lacey
Dave Reise
Erik Venzke
Shavon Alexander
Valerie Watkins
Tamara Bosman
Diego Forshaw
Kristie Nelson
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Tracy Mitchell
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Katrina Jones
Ananias Epps
Ramon Robinson
Paul Bordine
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Danita Smith

It has now been more than a year since Branch 2184 responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by restructuring our steward and executive board meetings to that of a telephonic and Internet-based format. During more recent months we have also begun conducting our monthly membership meetings in this manner. Full credit goes to our stewards and branch officers for doing what it took to enable the revised meeting formats to work. As of this time there are no planned changes in your present meeting structure during at least the next several months.

A recent resurgence in COVID-19 cases in Michigan and elsewhere underscores the paramount importance of continuing to maintain our vigilance and to take necessary steps to protect the stewards, officers, and the membership of the Branch. **If you have not already received your vaccination(s) and have not scheduled them, you are strongly encouraged to do ASAP.** Additionally, our members should also be encouraged to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations if they have not already done so. Branch President Walter McGregor will continue to monitor progress with vaccinations and the other pandemic-related steps that are necessary prior to possibly returning to some form of in person meetings in the future.

A reminder that Branch President McGregor has called a special meeting for the sole purpose of conducting nominations for Branch officers, station stewards, and convention delegates for the remainder of the 2021 to 2023 term of office. This meeting will take place outdoors on the Branch grounds on Sunday afternoon, May 23, 2021 beginning at 2:00 p.m. Following the conclusion of nominations an election will take place for any contested positions. The election will be conducted by mail ballot in the manner prescribed by our Branch bylaws.

As expected, there is a lot of buzz among our members regarding the recently ratified 2019-2023 Contract, especially (as expected) the pay raises and eventual retroactive pay. With the inclusion of the third COLA of the current contract term, the retroactive pay will be calculated based on five separate pay increases that became effective at various times during the retroactive pay period. It is expected that the new pay rates will be effective either with pay period 9, beginning on April 10, or with pay period 10, beginning on April 24.

The period covered by retroactive pay will be from November 23, 2019 through the day before the effective date of the new pay rates – either April 9 or April 23, 2021. As such, it is not unreasonable to expect a significant delay in calculating the back pay for more than 200,000 letter carriers. Current estimates (not set in stone) are that this should be completed this summer around mid-July. Retroactive pay reflecting each of the five pay increases during this period will apply to all paid hours – work, overtime, holiday, and paid leave.

Another subject of significant interest and discussion is Emergency Federal Employee Leave (EFEL), a part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, better known as the stimulus plan. Up to 600 hours of fully paid leave is available to federal and postal employees beginning March 12, 2021 and continuing through September 30, 2021 – or until funding for reimbursement is exhausted. The leave is available to employees that are unable to work due to one of eight qualifying

reasons. A chart and additional information concerning the EFEL leave accompanies the materials on our Branch website for the April 2021 steward meetings.

One aspect of the EFEL leave that has caused unnecessary controversy and misinformation is that this leave does not count as creditable service toward an employee's retirement benefits. This was also the case with last year's Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). Essentially, while in an approved EFEL leave status, the employee's USPS service credit and benefits are frozen – similar to being in a LWOP status. Thus, there are also no TSP contributions or matches with this leave. **However, a fulltime career carrier's creditable service toward retirement is otherwise unaffected in any manner unless he or she accrues more than 6 months of LWOP (1040 hours) in a single pay year.** As noted above, the EFEL leave is capped at 600 hours. Thus, unless an employee using the full 600 hours also uses more than 440 hours (11 weeks) of additional LWOP during that pay year, they would still receive a full year's retirement credit. Also keep in mind that a career USPS employee's LWOP balance resets to zero at the beginning of every year.

The NALC and the Postal Service have entered into several Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) which have extended previous pandemic-related MOUs through Friday, June 4, 2021, or they have reimplemented them. All of these MOUs are included with the materials on our Branch website for the April 2021 steward meetings. Of note, because of the EFEL leave available under the American Rescue Plan, the MOU concerning additional paid leave for CCAs was suspended (see M-01941). The parties will meet prior to the June 4 expiration date of the suspended MOU to determine if a further extension is appropriate. Additionally, as was the case for leave year 2021, the National parties have agreed that regular workforce employees will again be able to carry over up to 520 hours of accumulated annual leave for leave year 2022 instead of the usual 440 hours (see M-01940). As before, this MOU does not change any other aspect of existing ELM provisions concerning accumulated leave.

The NALC and the Postal Service also signed two additional MOUs (M-01946 and M-01947) related to the conversion of qualifying CCAs to career status under the terms of the new Contract. The first (M-01946, Implementation of CCA Conversion to Career Status) recognizes that in some cases an anomaly exists with timelines for these conversions and sets forth specific conditions and prescribes monetary remedies to CCAs that achieve the required 24 months relative standing between March 12 and March 26, 2021.

The second (M-01947, Reassignment Opportunities) addresses the necessity of continuing to convert CCAs to career status when required for reasons other than achieving 24 months of relative standing, per the previous MOUs regarding this matter. It clarifies, among other things, the CCAs converted to career status in accordance with the new 24-month MOU – Re: City Carrier Assistants – Conversion to Career Status, WILL count toward the existing ratios (1 in 4 and 1 in 6) for taking transfers. Additionally, effective with the date of the MOU, employees who accept pending transfer requests through eReassign will report to their new installation as a PTF and begin a new period of seniority. This essentially returns the voluntary transfer process to the way it originally was prior to the advent of CCAs.

As they periodically do, the USPS recently sent annuity estimates to thousands of career workforce employees that have reached the minimum thresholds to be eligible for a voluntary (employee initiated) FERS retirement from the Postal Service. Unfortunately, throughout the United States this resulted a significant amount of confusion and misinformation being spread about a wholly non-existent "early out" for career letter carriers. It is also apparent that there is very large amount of misinformation and lack of understanding about the USPS and FERS retirement process in general among letter carriers, and not just with newer letter carriers.

To be clear, there is NO existing or proposed VERA (Voluntary Early Retirement Authority) authorization requested for the City Carrier workforce by the Postal Service. Not surprisingly, the USPS has requested a VERA for EAS (management) employees in an attempt to cull some of the glut of nonproductive deadwood in USPS management. However, it is extremely unlikely that a VERA (an early out) will be requested for City Letter Carriers, given the serious staffing shortages that presently exist with letter carrier complements in thousands of Postal Service Installations across the United States, including many installations here in Branch 2184. Those that are already retirement eligible can -- and should continue to base their retirement decisions on their own specific personal and financial circumstances.

During a recent teleconference, NALC National President Fred Rolando announced that the NALC National Convention that was originally scheduled in Honolulu, Hawaii last August and that had been postponed due to the pandemic was now officially canceled. The next NALC National Convention will be in Chicago, Illinois August 8-12, 2022. Those that would like to be delegates to this convention as well as the next MISALC (Michigan State Association) convention in the spring of 2023 must make sure that they are nominated as Branch 2184 convention delegates at the forthcoming special membership meeting on May 23.