

# 2019 CONTRACT RATIFIED AS COVID-19 PANDEMIC TIGHTENS GRIP

ON ESSENTIAL WORKERS AND MAIL HANDLERS

Paul V. Hogrogian, National President



**T**he NPMHU is outraged and saddened over the senseless and disgraceful deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Rayshard Brooks. Unfortunately, racism still exists and continues to affect the lives of all working people of color. Racism is indeed a workplace issue which cannot be ignored. The NPMHU stands with those who fight to end racial, social and economic injustice and support the right to peacefully demonstrate on these issues. The NPMHU will continue to fight for justifiable police reform and oppose bigotry and discrimination. We encourage our members to join us in this fight.

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I am pleased to report that the terms of our 2019 National Agreement were officially ratified by our membership on April 7, 2020. The results were 7,003 (96%) in favor of ratification and 255 opposed, and the ratification vote was certified by True Ballot.

It was a long and tough bargaining process, but after all was said and done, we achieved many gains and benefits for all Mail Handlers, without making any significant concessions.

Our priorities entering bargaining included:

1. A fair and just general wage increase
2. A continuation of our current Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)

3. Keep the No Lay Off clause
4. Improve the wages, rights and benefits for our MHAs
5. Increase MHA conversions to career status
6. Return subcontracted work to the Mail Handler Craft and stop future subcontracting
7. Minimize the dislocation and inconvenience to Mail Handlers subject to involuntary reassignments
8. Fight any USPS proposals to implement any new lower wage scale and reduced benefits for future career employees
9. Address the issue of MHAs serving as 204Bs
10. Achieving an MOU on Sexual Harassment and Discrimination in the USPS.

We believe that the tentative agreement addresses most, if not all, of our bargaining priorities. This was not a particularly



opportune time during which to bargain considering the Postal Service's dire financial situation and the anti-worker/anti-union climate in Washington, DC.

The conversion of MHAs to career employees remains a priority for the NPMHU. One of the provisions of the newly ratified National Agreement provides for the conversion to full-time regular career status of all MHAs who have served as a MHA for more than two and a half years as of the ratification of the contract. This resulted in the conversion of hundreds more MHAs.

The NPMHU bargaining team was led by the National President and included National Secretary-Treasurer Mike Hora, Manager of Contract Administration Teresa Harmon, Executive Assistant to the National President Bobby Blum, National CAD Representatives Kevin Fletcher and Charles Manago and our legal team from the NPMHU's General Counsel's office. The National Executive Board was fully engaged in this process and was deeply involved in the bargaining decisions. I want to thank the members of the bargaining team and the National Executive Board for their hard work during these negotiations. I also want to thank all the Regional and Local Union representatives as well as many rank and file members who provided us with information when we reached out to obtain research for some of the proposals and counter-proposals.

The Contract Administration Department will now focus its efforts on the implementation of the terms of the new

National Agreement. These efforts will include updating the Contract Interpretation Manual (CIM) to incorporate new and modified contract provisions and language as well as adding the National Arbitrations and Step 4 agreements that were issued since the last update. I am confident that we will have an updated CIM in the near future.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the Postal Service and all of its 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 American public, especially rural America, has come to depend on the Post Office and Mail Handlers for the processing and delivery of prescription drugs, social security and pension checks, ballots and other election materials, e-commerce and other items of critical importance. All postal employees have stepped up and provided the needed services. Mail Handlers deserve to be provided with the protections that they need in order to do their jobs as safely as possible. The NPMHU strongly believes that Mail Handlers and all postal workers, who put their health and safety on the line every day, are entitled to hazard pay and calls on Congress to pass the appropriate legislation.

Thousands of postal workers have been confirmed to be COVID-19 positive or presumed to be positive. The latest numbers show that over sixty seven postal workers have passed away as a result of the pandemic, including four Mail Handlers. We all mourn for them.

NPMHU representatives 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. NPMHU representatives insist that all Mail Handlers be provided with the personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, wipes, etc.) that they need, as well as ensuring that the proper protocols are in place



to minimize the exposure of Mail Handlers to the COVID-19 virus. As more and more postal workers are returning to work, the NPMHU and the other postal unions are in discussions with senior postal management to implement temperature taking procedures in postal installations. Postal management has stated that the Postal Service will continue to follow the guidance of the "health experts" such as CDC and HHS.

Our Regional Directors also are in constant contact with their counterparts in the Postal Area Offices to discuss COVID-19 issues. If you are aware of any violations of the protocols listed above, please bring them to the attention of your local union representatives so that they may refer them to the Regional Directors. Our Regional Directors have been extremely successful in rectifying problems brought to their attention. However, they cannot correct a problem of which they are not aware.

A liberal leave policy remains in effect with regard to COVID-19 related absences including childcare related absences. The Postal Service has assured us that liberal leave (Sick Leave/Annual Leave/LWOP) will be granted in these situations.

The recently enacted Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) also provides additional paid leave (up to 80 hours) for certain COVID-19 related absences and up to 12 weeks of paid leave to provide for childcare needed because of the virus.

The Postal Service has agreed with us that COVID-19 related absences should be recorded as a "scheduled" absence and not be used as a basis for discipline or for termination during probationary periods. These absences should also not be considered when rehiring MHAs for new terms or for conversion to Full-Time Regular career status.

To address the understaffing of Mail Handlers as a result of the large number of COVID-19 related absences, the NPMHU has negotiated an MOU that allows the Postal Service to exceed the allowable percentages for MHAs for a period of 60 days. The MOU also ensures that those Mail Handlers on the Overtime Desired List will not be adversely affected by the hiring of the extra MHAs. This MOU along with the Liberal Leave policy is set to expire on July 17, 2020 unless mutually extended by the parties.

The health and safety of our members continues to be our priority. We will continue to ensure that the Postal Service complies with its own protocols by providing the needed supplies and cleaning materials, by performing the necessary cleanings on a regular basis, by keeping employees informed with daily stand up talks, and by ensuring that our members are protected by following the quarantine recommendations of the CDC.

It is crucial that lines of communication among the Postal Service, unions, and employees remain open. It is equally as important that all our members be kept informed of the latest developments. Please read your bulletin boards and visit

our website (NPMHU.org) and our mobile APP on a regular basis to obtain the latest information. We must be vigilant about how we go about our business, but we must remain as calm as possible. We will all get through this together. Please stay safe.

If you have any questions, please contact your steward or another Union Representative.

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I want to take this opportunity to recognize my friend and brother Sam D'Ambrosio who passed away in early April. Sammy was truly one of the "greats" of the Mail Handlers Union. Sam served the Union at both the Local and National levels. He served as AVP (Branch President) of the Pittsburgh BMC (NDC), President of Local 322 for nine years, and Eastern Region Vice President on the National Executive Board for twenty years. However, the position of which he was most proud was National Shop Steward Trainer. Sam trained and molded hundreds, if not thousands, of Mail Handler representatives. The NPMHU and all Mail Handlers are in a much better place because of him. Sam may be gone, but he will never be forgotten.



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 any and 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