



# MAIL HANDLER UPDATE

NATIONAL POSTAL MAIL HANDLERS UNION

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## NPMHU ACHIEVES 10,000 MHA CONVERSIONS TO FULL-TIME REGULAR



**Timothy M. Dwyer**  
Secretary-Treasurer

In February 2013, a three-member arbitration panel established to determine the terms of the 2011 National Agreement between the National Postal Mail Handlers Union and the U.S. Postal Service released its Award establishing a new category of non-career mail handler called the Mail Handler Assistant or MHA.

From that point forward, the MHA category has served as the entry point for all future career mail handlers to be hired by the Postal Service. In the current 2016 National Agreement, the Union made changes that reduced the number of non-union casual employees to 3%, while shifting this complement balance to union-represented MHAs by increasing the percentage of Mail Handler Assistants by 3.5%. Additionally, the 2016 National Agreement contains six separate wage increases for MHAs, as well as MHA holiday leave pay for six holidays per year.

The NPMHU has pursued other MHA improvements over the past five years, such as Memoranda of Understanding addressing relative standing for MHAs, separation and reappointment of MHAs for lack of work, discipline of MHAs, and the filling residual vacancies, all of which were incorporated into the terms of the 2016 Agreement. The MOU on Filling Residual Vacancies has significantly increased the number of MHA conversions to career, allowing MHAs to be converted as unassigned regulars rather than waiting for the E-reassign process to play itself out.

Unlike casuals, MHAs are members of the NPMHU bargaining unit, are hired based on the postal exam and other routine hiring criteria, and enjoy eligibility for conversion to career status based on their relative standing. Although MHAs work flexible hours and may be separated for lack of work, many provisions of the National Agreement do apply to their employment, and the Union is able to represent them in the grievance and arbitration process.

The NPMHU recognized from the very beginning that MHAs, both before and after their conversion to career, would become important components of the future of the organization. As of Pay Period 6 of 2018, there are a total of 6,395 MHAs on-the-rolls of the Postal Service, which makes up approximately 14.4% of the NPMHU bargaining unit. Moreover, in July 2018, the NPMHU will acquire our 10,000th MHA conversion to full-time status as a career mail handler. We welcome these new career employees to their permanent status with the Postal Service and the NPMHU.

Unfortunately, records at the National Office indicate that about one-in-four MHAs are not joining the Union. We need everyone to be a part of the team.

MHAs are eligible for Union membership from day one of their employment, and the NPMHU needs to do everything necessary to ensure that all MHAs join their Union. Please join the only Union – the NPMHU – that is fighting for you.

Conversion to full-time career triggers certain strictly enforced timelines. Newly converted mail handlers have 60 days from the date of their career appointment to enroll in a health insurance plan offered through the Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) program. If a newly converted mail handler does not make an election in the allotted time period, that employee will be considered to have declined coverage, and the employee must wait until the next Open Season to enroll, with the exception of certain qualifying life events.

Although newly converted career mail handlers have 60 days to enroll in the FEHB, it is to the employee's advantage to make this election as soon as possible in order to be covered in case of accident or illness. Coverage will begin on the first day of the first pay period that begins after the employing office receives each enrollment request. There is no retroactive coverage for expenses prior to the effective date of enrollment. A new career employee should consider this scheduling before canceling any other health insurance coverage that he or she already may have and before scheduling doctor visits or tests.

If an employee previously elected coverage in the USPS Non-Career Employee Health Benefits Plan as an MHA, coverage in that Non-Career Plan will be automatically terminated 28 days (or two pay periods) after conversion to career mail handler. The employee should make every effort to elect an FEHB plan by the end of the pay period prior to coverage termination to avoid having a gap in health benefits coverage. All new mail handlers, as well as all other career postal employees, are encouraged to take a look at the Union's sponsored health plan – MHBP®. Career postal employees are not eligible to continue in the Non-Career Plan; nor can a newly converted career postal employee maintain both Non-Career Plan coverage and FEHB coverage.

The NPMHU will continue to champion wage and benefits improvements for all mail handlers. MHAs will continue to convert to career, enjoy holiday pay, and file and win grievances. MHAs or former MHAs will also become stewards and arbitration advocates. MHAs or former MHAs will be elected to leadership positions and will sit on Local Union Executive Boards and Local Union Councils across the country. MHAs or former MHAs are the future of the NPMHU: that is a mathematical certainty.

### NPMHU MEETS WITH PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE DURING 120-DAY STUDY OF USPS

In April 2018, the Trump Administration issued an Executive Order creating a task force charged with evaluating the operations and finances of the U.S. Postal Service, covering topics like pricing, USPS policies, and workforce costs. Specifically, the Task Force is being chaired by the Secretary of the Treasury or his designee, and other members include the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and any other department or agency head the Chair may designate.

National President Paul Hogrogian and National Secretary-Treasurer Tim Dwyer were invited to the U.S. Treasury Building on May 15, 2018 to meet with representatives of the Task Force. In attendance were a host of government officials designated not only by

the Treasury Department, but also by OMB and OPM. This "listening session," as the Task Force described it, was led by Kipp Kranbuhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Small Business, Community Development & Housing Policy, and Clay Berry, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for the Office of Financial Markets.

Hogrogian and Dwyer led the conversation, starting with a description of mail handlers, their work, and their contribution to the Postal Service. Because the NPMHU was the first outside stakeholder invited to meet with the Task Force, the Union also provided a short overview of USPS finances and its network operations since enactment of the PAEA in 2006, through the Great Recession of 2008, and in relation to the recent electronic diversion of letter mail volume and

the recent increase in package mail. There also were discussions relating to ongoing legislative efforts at postal reform, the need to reject additional enforcement of pre-funding for retiree health or pension costs, the use of USPS assumptions in calculating unfunded liabilities, and the intrinsic value attributable to the existing USPS monopolies, the network infrastructure maintained by the Postal Service, and the need for continuing universal service.

Once the evaluation is completed, the Task Force is supposed to develop recommendations on administrative and legislative reforms for the Postal Service. Only time will tell whether this Task Force is able to stimulate appropriate reform, or whether its written report provides just another addition to the landfill of prior reports that were essentially pointless and therefore correctly ignored.



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