

How LCPF and your state association works for you



NALC members meet with Rep. Nicole Malliotakis (R-NY) to discuss legislation that would help letter carriers.

For letter carriers, most contractual issues are dealt with locally, with their stewards or branch officers. When larger issues arise, they might go to the national business agent's (NBA) office or even NALC Headquarters.

But there are issues that can't be dealt with in collective bargaining and must be handled by Congress. There, on Capitol Hill, NALC works with House and Senate members to secure the future of both the Postal Service and letter carrier jobs. To do this work, NALC uses two tools: the Letter Carrier Political Fund, to help elect friends of letter carriers to Congress, and the NALC state associations, to help inform and educate the people elected to Congress about upcoming legislation.

Paul Rozzi, president of the Pennsylvania State Association of Letter Carriers, explains the importance of being involved in the legislative and political process by pointing to Article 43, Section 1 of the National Agreement. That section declares that Congress or the courts can change anything in the National Agreement. Rozzi tells NALC members, "Whatever you have today could be gone tomorrow." And that's where the state associations come in.

State associations exist in every state except Alaska, and they play a key role in NALC's legislative activities by developing valuable, positive relationships with each member of Congress. There is no better way to educate members of Congress and influence them to support letter carriers than having lawmakers hear the message from letter carriers who live and vote in their states or congressional districts.

"We deal strictly with our members of Congress," Alabama State Association President **Antonia Shields** said, "trying to get bills passed that are in favor of letter carriers."

Rozzi says he gets support from Pennsylvania letter carriers by explaining the various pieces of legislation to them: "These are the bills that are out there. This is how passing them will affect letter carriers. This is how not passing them or repealing them will affect letter carriers."

This isn't a new role for letter carriers—letter carrier activists have been doing the same for more than a century. In 1892, 41 letter carriers from 17 small Massachusetts cities met to discuss the equalization of wages—which they felt NALC wasn't doing enough about—and ultimately formed the Massachusetts Association of Letter Carriers of Second-Class Offices. By 1903, NALC had grown significantly, and state associations had been institutionalized as part of the union's structure.

The July 1903 *Postal Record* extolled the benefits of state meetings, including the promotion of mutual support, the sharing of opinions among branches and the opportunity to meet with their members of Congress. Over the ensuing decades, state associations continued to hold trainings and educational seminars on all manner of letter carrier topics, with one of their primary responsibilities always having been to work on legislative issues.

West Virginia State Association President **Joe Paden**, who has been the state president for an extraordinary 39 years, explained that beginning back in the 1980s, as a leader of the state association, he would travel to Washington, DC, twice a year to be briefed by Headquarters on the legislative agenda for letter carriers. "They basically trained us on the legislative process, on the issues," he said. "And then we made an attempt to go up on the Hill and visit our legislators."

Letter carriers meet with Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE) at her office in Washington, DC.



In 2006, the state associations' primary function of working on legislative and political issues was formalized. Delegates to the 65th Biennial National Convention in Las Vegas amended Article 1, Section 2 of the *NALC Constitution for the Government of State Associations* to read as follows:

Sec. 2. The objects of this Association are to assist the National Association of Letter Carriers in maintaining a more perfect organization and improving the Postal Service; to organize all letter carriers within the State; and to guide and direct all activities relating to legislation within the State. This Association shall have the authority to coordinate with the National Business Agent regarding seminars and training schools on State, District, and Branch levels, which shall be financed by the NALC and directed by the National Business Agent. Effective September 1, 2006, State Association financial resources previously expended on seminars and training shall be expended in pursuance of and consistent with the object stated above: 'to guide and direct all activities relating to legislation within the state.'

To accomplish this, state associations have letter carrier congressional liaisons (LCCLs) in place. LCCLs are constituents responsible for maintaining a relationship with one member of the House or Senate and their office staff in their home districts to complement the work done by Headquarters in Washington. The state association provides the LCCLs with the knowledge and resources needed to develop and foster these relationships.

This is not an easy task, as some members of Congress will not make time for union representatives, so much of the state association's work is done in this area. But it helps that NALC members match the makeup of their districts, which has allowed letter car-

riers to connect on commonalities and develop relationships with members of Congress across the political spectrum.

"We are a cross section of the society," Pennsylvania President Rozzi said. And that helps in finding the right LCCL to spread the message.

"We need to make sure [the LCCLs] are knowledgeable about our issues and also willing to stick to the messaging as well," **Tim Fisher**, president of the Arizona State Association, said. "Ideally, they live in the district. They understand what our goals are as an organization."

But understanding the messaging is not enough. Much of the work comes down to getting access, and that means finding LCCLs who can gain that access.

"You tailor things to each particular congressman, and you kind of watch who you are sending to meet with them," Rozzi said. In Pennsylvania, "we would send veterans, retirees, whatever."

In a state dominated by conservative politics, such as Alabama, Shields has to get creative in selecting carriers who can get access. "I look around the district and find someone who either knows one of their children, knows somebody in their family or has some kin to them," she said. "So, when we go in, they say, 'Hey, I played football with your son.' 'Hey, I was a cheerleader with your daughter.'"

"[The members of Congress] definitely do listen a little bit more with their constituents because it means more to them," Wisconsin State Association President **Dawn Ahnen** said. The presence or lack of that tie can mean a vote won or lost.

In West Virginia, Paden has learned that it can be just as important to develop a relationship with the congressional staff. "If you get to a staff mem-

State associations (continued)



Central Florida Branch 1091 invited Rep. Maxwell Alejandro Frost (D-FL) to speak at a branch meeting.

ber, maybe they will get the message to the member,” he said.

He recently sent two new LCCLs to meet with congressional staff back in West Virginia. He asked them to explain the importance of door-to-door delivery to the staff, personalizing it by asking the staff whether they want their grandparents to have to trudge through the snow to try to get the mail, if there is no door-to-door delivery.

Paden advised them not to introduce themselves as union members, and to instead introduce themselves as letter carriers. “They’re interested in legislation that affects their customers, like door-to-door delivery,” he said, adding that it helps the LCCLs get a foot in the door and get to know the staff.

Along those lines, Pennsylvania President Rozzi said, “Every year I tell them, find out if the staff is the same, reintroduce yourself and say that you’re staying in the role. Look up the staff for the representative. Where did they go to school? Did they do this? Did they do that? How [the representative] voted on various bills other than Postal Service bills. And then you go from there.”

Rozzi also suggested finding out what the representative’s areas of interests are, such as working on veterans’ issues or green energy, for example, and then trying “to fit our needs into that framework,” he said.

LCCLs should keep tabs on local opportunities and roundtables to remain engaged in more relaxed spaces. LPOs and the state association presidents can help identify those opportunities.

With some members of Congress, it’s about maintaining an already good relationship. “We talk about different ways to reach your representatives, whether they’re having a pancake

brunch or a fundraiser,” Wisconsin’s Ahnen said. “Congresswoman Gwen Moore [D-WI] invites us to her birthday party every year.”

Ahnen also invites members of Congress to letter carrier events. “It’s a good bang for their buck,” she said. “You get 90-some people in one room.”

Most importantly, the LCCL must be persuasive, West Virginia President Paden said. “You’ve got to get the message to [the member of Congress]. What it is and what it means and how it’s going to be beneficial. If you don’t do that, you can’t expect them to vote for it or support it.”

To help, NALC President Brian L. Renfroe appoints legislative and political organizers (LPOs) to assist state associations in promoting and protecting letter carrier interests on Capitol Hill. LPOs help develop and implement plans specifically designed for the legislative challenges within each state. They assist with the education and training of other letter carriers, officers and rank-and-file activists to help carry out the plans.

In practice, this often involves the LPOs sending information about legislation as it is being introduced to the state association and the NBAs.

Ahnen said that in Wisconsin, that means receiving reports from the LPO and sending them along to the LCCLs. Most of the LCCLs will communicate that information with the congressional staff, but Ahnen stays on top of it. “If I don’t get a quarterly report or something, I’ll reach out to them and be like, ‘Is everything OK? Do you need some help?’” she said.

Fisher talked about receiving information from his LPO, John Beaumont, about the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82). “We got a meeting with Rep.

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) was invited by the Virginia State Association to address its state convention.



Andy Biggs [R-AZ] 30 minutes after John gave us information about H.R. 82.”

In addition to communicating with members of Congress, state associations hold conventions and trainings. The education involved here often pertains to pending congressional resolutions or bills, to how letter carriers can participate in legislative activities, and to how the overall political environment affects our jobs, the workplace and the Postal Service.

“We have our business agent come in and do training on legislation and bring our legislative person in from National to speak with us,” Shields said of the Alabama conventions.

In Arizona, the state association is running a retirement seminar this month. Fisher said he plans to use that training as a chance to talk to retiring letter carriers about relevant legislative issues and to encourage them to give to the political action committee (PAC).

NALC’s PAC, the Letter Carrier Political Fund (LCPF), works to help elect candidates who will support letter carriers and their issues. The state associations help with that effort, communicating to our members the need for political contributions.

Shields tells letter carriers, “This is like life insurance for your job. It’s job insurance.”

Fisher said that the conversation often becomes about which candidates NALC will support, but it’s not about party. “We’re going to support anybody that supports our issues,” he tells them.

In West Virginia, Paden will go to a branch meeting and make the pitch for contributing to LCPF. Then he has help from his LPO in signing up members at the meeting to contribute. “Once we make our speech, we can say, ‘And sitting right back there at that table is

Rob, and he can sign you up today.’ ”

Because of the Hatch Act and its limits on what letter carriers can talk about on the clock, state association leaders have to find ways they can get the messages about legislation and politics to the NALC members in their state.

“I’ve been harping on this since the day I got in,” Pennsylvania President Rozzi said. “You have to mention it at meetings. You have to send it in the newsletter. But you have to go further. And that’s a process. Occasionally I’ll go and stand outside of certain post offices in the morning and try to talk to people.”

As Arizona President Fisher phrased it, “Honestly, I think that the reason that a lot of newer carriers aren’t all that familiar with the state association is because even at branch meetings, it’s not really something that comes up all that often, except when it’s state convention time or if you have someone on the state executive board who’s there to kind of give a legislative update on something.”

Paden agreed. Whether that’s to communicate information to members, branch officers, legislators or the public, “one of our main roles is to be the messenger.”

You can be a part of that voice; participation with your state association will provide you with training and information on local and statewide political efforts. New members bring fresh perspectives, renewed energy and unique ideas to these activities. Reach out to your local branch or state association to see how you can get involved.

Though not as well recognized as contractual work, this can make a major difference to letter carriers. “It’s every bit as important as everything else that the union does,” Pennsylvania President Rozzi said. **PR**

By making a contribution to the Letter Carrier Political Fund, you are doing so voluntarily with the understanding that your contribution is not a condition of membership in the National Association of Letter Carriers or of employment by the Postal Service, nor is it part of union dues. You have a right to refuse to contribute without any reprisal. The Letter Carrier Political Fund will use the money it receives to contribute to candidates for federal office and undertake other political spending as permitted by law. Your selection shall remain in full force and effect until canceled. Contributions to the Letter Carrier Political Fund are not deductible for federal income tax purposes. Federal law prohibits the Letter Carrier Political Fund from soliciting contributions from individuals who are not NALC members, executive and administrative staff or their families. Any contribution received from such an individual will be refunded to that contributor. Federal law requires us to use our best efforts to collect and report the name, mailing address, occupation and name of employer of individuals whose contributions exceed \$200 per calendar year. Any guideline amount is merely a suggestion, and an individual is free to contribute more or less than the guideline suggests and the union will not favor or disadvantage anyone by reason of the amount of his or her contribution or decision not to contribute.