

Contract Administration Unit

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Orientation for new career employees

Orientation for new career city letter carriers is extremely important, as it is the first opportunity to explain to them their benefits, such as annual leave and sick leave, the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), the various Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program insurance plans, Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI), and flexible spending accounts (FSAs). Making sure that orientation is provided promptly is critical, as some benefits such as FEHB, FEGLI and FSAs have a 60-day enrollment period that begins on their first day as a career employee.

In many locations throughout the country, new city letter carriers are hired directly to career part-time flexible positions and attend the Welcome to the USPS (W2USPS) orientation as part of their onboarding process. Portions of the W2USPS orientation explain benefits and thereby inform those new career employees of their options. However, many new employees are hired as non-career city carrier assistant (CCA) letter carriers, and while these non-career employees may attend the W2USPS orientation at the time they are first hired as a CCA, they never receive the proper orientation when they later convert to career. If they do not receive orientation upon conversion to career, this is a violation of their rights.

Section 715.2 of the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)* outlines the requirement to provide orientation to all new career employees, including CCAs who are converted to career status, on their first day as a career Postal Service employee. That section of the *ELM* states:

An orientation program is required at all levels for new career employees on their first day of official duty.

As a newly appointed career Postal Service employee, letter carriers are eligible to enroll in FEHB insurance plans. Section 524 of the *ELM* sets forth the rules and regulations regarding enrollment in these plans.

Section 524.521 of the *ELM* explains the time limits for enrollment as follows:

New Appointment—a new employee eligible for coverage may enroll within 60 days after date of appointment in any available plan, option, and type of enrollment.

New career letter carriers have 60 days from the effective date of their appointment to enroll in a FEHB plan. If these employees do not receive orientation on their first day of official duty as a career employee, they might be unaware of these time limits. Ultimately, some new career letter carriers may not be given the full time span to

make a proper determination about, or even given the opportunity to enroll in, their preferred benefits plan. If this happens, it can cause the new career city letter carrier and their family members significant harm by depriving them of their benefits until the next open season. Article 17, Section 6 of the National Agreement grants the union the right to address new employees during any employment orientation prior to the employee being provided health benefit enrollment forms. Article 17, Section 6 states in part:

Health benefit enrollment information and forms will not be provided during orientation until such time as a representative of the Union has had an opportunity to address such new employees.

The national parties have agreed that NALC representatives shall have the right to discuss the available NALC Health Benefit Plan's plans during orientation. This joint understanding is found in the explanation of Article 17, Section 6 on page 17-9 of the 2022 *Joint Contract Administration Manual (JCAM)*, which states in part:

The union will also be provided an opportunity to discuss and address the NALC Health Benefit Plans available to career employees, pursuant to Article 17.6, when a CCA becomes a career employee.

If new career letter carriers are not provided the above-mentioned orientation information on their first day of employment as a career employee, or if the union is not provided the opportunity to address those new employees, a grievance should be initiated. Union representatives should request that management cease and desist violating the National Agreement as well as the *ELM*. Grievance remedies also should ask that affected employees be provided with career employee orientation in accordance with Section 715.2 of the *ELM* as soon as administratively possible.

Once this orientation is provided, we should ask that those individuals be given 60 days from the date of their career orientation to review, enroll and make any necessary changes to any previously selected career employee benefits plan options. When appropriate, we also should ask that they be made whole for any lost benefits and expenses incurred due to not being able to select a plan or option in a timely manner.

NALC has created a grievance starter to assist branch representatives with filing grievances on this issue. Along with dozens of grievance starters on other topics, this grievance starter is available in the Members Only section of the NALC website. Additionally, branch officers can contact their national business agent for a copy.