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WMAL VOICE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
WESTERN MICHIGAN AREA LOCAL #281
AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION, AFL-CIO





WMAL Voice

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P-CAMPUS OFFICE (616) 977-1050
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OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT 888-767-6738
retirement line

HR SHARED SERVICES CENTER—Shared Services Line 877-477-3273
PostalEase option 1
Job Bidding Line option 2
Sick/Unscheduled Leave Request option 4
Human Resources option 5

HARD OF HEARING - FEDERAL RELAY SERVICE 800-877-8339

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Editorial Policy: Submissions are welcome from all APWU members, sent to the address or email listed above. In accordance with the local constitution, the editor reserves the right to determine if material submitted to this publication shall be printed, and reserves the right to edit as needed for space and clarity. The views and opinions expressed within are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the editor, local officers, or the APWU. All material must be signed, though names may be withheld upon request. The WMAL Voice is published bimonthly.

As of March 2005, a policy was instated to publish member condolences, births, marriages, and anniversaries. Please let me know at editor@wmal.org of anything you would like included. Pictures are welcomed!

The Long And Short Of It

By Michael Long, President

Voluntary Early Out (VERA) – As you have heard by now, the US Postal Service is offering an Early Out (Early Retirement) for eligible employees in the bargaining unit. It was told to me that they are looking to cut over 60k employees. Even the PMG said he is trying to “lean” the ranks. He stated: “I’m not trying to take over the package business industry. I’m trying to just fill my trucks and fill my carrier bags, right?” DeJoy said. “And once I do that, and I’ve leaned out the whole place, we have potentially a chance of covering our costs and saving the Postal Service.”

Before you take the incentive, make sure you read everything you can possibly review and attend all the Webinars, Counselling Sessions, or such. It is not \$15,000 all at once (10k in August 2025, and another 5k in 2026).

Annual Leave – especially in light with the VERA. If you are looking at taking the VERA, be careful on how much annual leave you use until you retire. You could be liable to pay back the Postal Service for unearned leave you used. **ONLY USE LEAVE YOU HAVE ACTUALLY EARNED! NOT ADVANCED!**

eOPF – Have you checked your on-line Personnel file recently? If not, why not? If you are planning on retiring now or in the future, you want to make sure the information on your OPF is correct. Maybe you bought back your military time but it wasn’t credited properly. It is on you to make sure your information is correct. Have you ever been issued discipline, that you know of? I have heard of people looking at their eOPF and finding discipline that they never knew was issued to them.

Discipline – with that about looking in your eOPF, remember, the union can be present at a Pre-Disciplinary Investigative (PDI) / Investigative Interview (II) meeting, if you ask for the union to be there; however, nothing in the contract states that management must notify the union when you are issued discipline. We will not know you received discipline unless you tell us. And remember, you only have 14 days from the date the discipline is issued / received to file a grievance. Once you have gone beyond the 14 days, discipline is on your record for a minimum of two years.

Following Instructions – the Employee Labor Relations



Manual (ELM) states: “665.15 – Employees must obey the instructions of their supervisors. If an employee has reason to question the propriety of a supervisor’s order, the individual must nevertheless carry out the order and may immediately file a protest in writing to the official in charge of the installation or may appeal through official channels.” What does this mean? It means simply, when you are asked to do something, you do it. It doesn’t matter if you are told to move a dock truck and it might be grieved by the mail handler union later, you do what you are told to do. If you are told to go to Automation and you are a manual clerk and there are junior employees still in the section, you still follow the instructions, and you file a grievance and get compensated. If management tells you to stay overtime and it is less than an hour notice before the end of your tour, then you stay, and file for compensation. Until management is personally held accountable for their actions and have to pay for these violations directly out of their own pockets, this type of flagrant disregard for the contract will unfortunately continue since they don’t have any personal stake in their decision.

However, there is no reason for the numbers of discipline over not following instructions. We are all adults at the Postal Service. And while I know as of late in the US as a whole, people want to be asked to do something. When one is told what to do and given a direction, instruction, or order, it takes on a whole new meaning, and that is when people decide to fight and argue or just ignore the direction; thus they are then issued discipline.

There are only two (2) main reasons one can refuse a direction: 1. Safety. Management can not direct you to do something that anyone using common sense would classify as unsafe (e.g. Sticking your hand in a moving machine, when you are on a narcotic due to pain and you are required to drive somewhere (this is a Federal law), etc.). However, I want to point out one thing. The union has argued that running a DBCS machine by yourself can be a safety hazard; however, we are our own worst enemies when it comes to arguing this. Why? Because

(Continued on page 11)

Calling-In? Do you use the on-line through Liteblue when you request leave? Before you do, read the below e-Mail from APWU Industrial Relations Director - Charlie Cash. You might want to think twice before using the system. If you do use on-line system because the phone system can not accurately respond to your voice, then stop using your voice. Use "1" for Yes, and "2" for No when prompted.

AIL

August 27, 2024

I have received multiple emails and questions on the Postal Services eLRA (online leave request system) that is accessed through liteblue. For years, when employees called in sick, they used a phone number to call in and upon their return a 3971 was printed and they signed it at work. Now, if employees use the online system, they receive a 3971 that says something like no signature need or digital signature—I am not sure because I have not seen one yet.

Years ago, when this system was put in place, it was only open to EAS employees. We cautioned everyone not to use it and to continue to call in because of the tracking and other data collected. It is now open to bargaining unit employees and our folks are using it I am sure because of the convenience and the fact they don't have to talk to anyone etc.

However, I once again caution against using the system. I have attached screenshots of what it looks like. This was a "request" I completed (but did not submit) to see how the system works. eLRA is found in the MyHR apps of liteblue. When you click on it you get a warning that you should do anything criminal and this sentence:

All information in this application may be monitored, intercepted, read, copied, captured, and disclosed by and to authorized personnel for official purposes, including criminal prosecution. Any authorized or unauthorized use of this application signifies consent to and compliance with Postal Service policies and these terms.

You need to assume that your browser data, your IP address, and location is being collected. One must agree to this just to get into eLRA. I will not go through every page, but the attached document shows them. Take note of page 9 of the PDF (13th screen). If you ask for more than 3 days of sick leave—it automatically asks for documentation. Next, take a look at pdf page 10 (also the 13th screen) where I changed my request to LWOP. It again asked me for documentation. Employees need to be aware that if they use this system, they are going to see this screen and you can bet management will use it against them if they don't bring in documentation. It is also concerning that it is asking for documentation when the 3-day language only refers to paid leave.

Finally take note of page 11 of the pdf (14th screen). This is the screen where the signature issue comes into play—you are authorizing your 3971 to be electronically signed. Employees need to know that they are agreeing to this. ***This is another reason this system should not be used.***

I am not making a statement on whether this is okay, contractual etc... I am reaching out to management with a list of questions on this process. Remember—no one is required to use this system—so they shouldn't! They need to be aware of what they are clicking on and agreeing to when using it. I will provide more information if and when the Service responds to my questions.

Thank you,

Charlie Cash

Industrial Relations Director
American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO

American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO

1300 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005

February 14, 2025

Sent via Email

Union Family and Leaders,

Please share this widely with the field. On August 27, 2024, I sent out an email regarding the usage of the eLRA (online leave request system). In that email (attached), I said, "However, I once again caution against using that system." The APWU position has not changed. In fact, I have been working on and discussing this issue with case officers Lynn Pallas-Barber and Jason Treier. We all agree that employees should avoid this system. Employees should call in using the IVR (phone line) or personally fill out PS form 3971s. In both cases, the employee is in control of the PS-Form 3971 and can physically sign it when they verify the information is correct.

If the eLRA system is used, the employee is acknowledging a couple of things:

- All information in this application may be monitored, intercepted, read, copied, captured, and disclosed by and to authorized personnel for official purposes, including criminal prosecution. Any authorized or unauthorized use of this application signifies consent to and compliance with Postal Service policies and these terms.
- Employees are also acknowledging that the submission is true and accurate and that they are "electronically signing" documents.

Again, it is the APWU position that eLRA should be avoided. It is the employee's choice—but they must read every screen. They are voluntarily using a system that is not required.

The APWU received late notification of the change to require an electronic signature—but after the toothpaste was out of the tube. We know that employees are using the system and want to use the system. ***Again, it is the APWU position that those we represent would be best served by not using the eLRA system.***

In late 2024, the parties exchanged a series of letters regarding the eLRA. The letters are attached as one document. Although the letters are not a "question and answers" or a "Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)" document, the APWU recognizes it as the official USPS Headquarters position. Things to note:

- There is no requirement to use the eLRA—it is voluntary.
- The IVR (phone system) can still be used to notify the Postal Service of absences.
- eLRA does not replace the paper PS-Form 3971 nor are there current plans for this.
- Employees should still be presented their PS-Form 3971 generated by the eLRA system for review upon their return.

It continues to be the position of the APWU that the F-21 handbook requires that employees be presented their PS-Form 3971 to review and verify upon their return to work from an unscheduled absence no matter how that form was generated. Those methods would include a direct call to the supervisor where that is the practice, a call to the IVR (phone call-in system), or by the eLRA system on LiteBlue.

If an employee is not presented with a copy of their PS-Form 3971 upon their return to work that has been generated with an electronic signature from the eLRA system, it would be in the interest of the employee and the APWU to investigate to determine if the filing of a grievance would be appropriate. We are hearing that employees are first seeing these PS-Form 3971's in investigatory interviews that could lead to discipline rather than upon their return to work.

The APWU has not been notified of any changes to any other policies, procedures, handbooks, or manuals. We were only notified of the electronic signature requirement.

Again, the APWU's position is that this system should be avoided. As further information is developed, changes to the system are implemented, or anything else of importance becomes known, we will notify the field.

In Solidarity,


Charlie Cash
Industrial Relations Director


Lynn Pallas-Barber
Assistant Director (B)
Clerk Division, Case Officer


Jason Treier, Assistant
Director (B), Maintenance
Division, Case Officer

Young Members - Now is our Time to Step Up

By *Brittany Thompson* -
Steward @ Hesperia & MPWU Area 9 Director



Answering the Call: Why Younger Members Must Step Up in Their Union

The strength of any union lies within the membership, and the future of that union depends greatly on the next generation of leaders stepping up when it matters most. For years, experienced union stewards have been the backbone of labor advocacy, ensuring fair treatment, upholding workers' rights, and protecting the benefits we all rely on. However, as many of these seasoned leaders prepare for retirement, a new challenge emerges: who will take their places?

To younger union members: the time to get involved is now. The future of your workplace, your rights, and your benefits depend on you stepping forward to carry the torch. Here's why your involvement is essential and how you can make a difference. With a wave of retirement of our more seasoned members is headed our way, many long-time stewards have spent decades fighting for better wages, working conditions, and benefits. As they prepare to retire, they leave behind some big shoes to fill.

The rights and benefits you enjoy today- fair pay, reasonable hours, and safe working conditions- didn't come easily. They were fought for by generations of union members. By becoming more involved, you ensure that these gains aren't lost and that future workers can enjoy the same protections.

Younger members bring energy, new ideas and a fresh perspective that can help unions stay relevant in a rapidly changing world. Whether it's embracing technology, addressing issues like work-life balance, or advocating for mental health supports, your voice is crucial for the union's evolution. Unions are only as strong as their members. The more engaged and active younger members are, the stronger the union becomes. Your involvement helps ensure that the union will remain a powerful force for change, not just for today, but for generations to come.

If you're not sure where to start, or even how to become more involved, start by attending union meetings, reading the newsletters that come out, and getting to know the issues your union is working on. Understanding the union's role and goals is the first step to becoming an

active participant. Another way to become more active is to volunteer. Volunteering for committees is a great way for members to contribute and even meet other engaged members.

Seek out training opportunities, often there is training offered for members interested in becoming stewards. These programs are invaluable for learning about labor laws, grievance handlings and negotiation tactics.

Take advantage of the knowledge and experience of retiring stewards while they're still here. I'm sure most of them would be happy to share with you and even help you with anything you need. Whether it's becoming a shop steward, joining the executive board, or chairing a committee, stepping into a leadership role is the most direct way to make an impact. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there- you might be surprised at how much support you receive.

Becoming active in your union isn't just about helping others- it's also an opportunity for personal growth. You'll gain valuable skills in leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and negotiation that will serve you well throughout your career. You'll also build a network of colleagues who share your values and commitment to workplace fairness.

The Union has always been a collective effort, driven by members who believe in the power of solidarity. As the more experienced stewards pass the baton, the next generation must rise to the occasion. By getting involved now, you can honor their legacy while building a stronger more resilient union for the future. The future of YOUR workplace, and YOUR rights depends on YOU. Will you answer the call?

Brittany

James A. Sweeney Scholarship Fund Rules

- ◇ There will be five (5) scholarships of \$1,000 each, given out annually.
- ◇ The applicant's sponsor(s) (parent or legal guardian) must have been a member of the bargaining unit, in good standing, of the Western Michigan Area Local #281 of the American Postal Workers Union for a minimum of one (1) year, immediately preceding application deadline; provided the sponsor is not a postal manager. Children of retired members of the bargaining unit are eligible to apply, provided the retiree had been a member of the local for at least one year, immediately prior to his/her retirement. To ensure an equal opportunity to obtain a scholarship, the applicant's name can only be submitted once per annum.
- ◇ Applicant(s) must be a senior attending, or has graduated from high school or other corresponding secondary school.
- ◇ The application form(s) for the scholarship shall appear in the Western Michigan Area Local's newsletter/publication representing the month of February. The submission deadline will be March 15 or the first Monday thereafter. Applications will be accepted through the mail only and should be addressed as follows:

WMAL
Attn: James A. Sweeney Scholarship
PO Box 2706
Grand Rapids, MI 49501

- ◇ The Scholarship Committee shall consist of up to five (5) members. Two (2) of these members shall be the currently elected Recording Secretary and Treasurer. One (1) member shall be the currently elected President, and he/she shall be designated as the Chairperson of the committee. The two (2) remaining members shall be appointed by the President.
- ◇ The committee shall convene before the regular April meeting to verify the parent(s)/legal guardian's membership qualifications; but not sooner than March 25th.
- ◇ The committee, upon verification of each application, shall number each application and place the number in a container designated by the committee. There shall be five (5) winners and a sufficient number of alternates drawn. The drawing will be held at the April General membership meeting during new business.
- ◇ Scholarship recipients must attend an accredited college; including community colleges and/or universities of his/her choice as a full-time student (Trade and vocational schools do not qualify for scholarship). Applicants must make their own applications to college.
- ◇ When the recipient notifies the Western Michigan Area Local's Treasurer that he/she has been accepted to the school, provided the winner notifies the union at least one month prior to the start of the academic year (to ensure that if an alternate needs to be chosen, it can be done so in a timely manner), the local treasurer will send to the school's business office a check, paid directly to the school attended by the winner, in the recipient's name. The scholarship will be sent to the respective school using the quarterly system in three (3) parts, or with schools using semesters, in two (2) parts. The scholarship must be used within the following scholastic year for tuition, books, or room and board.
- ◇ All disputes arising from the scholarship program shall be submitted to the President, within thirty (30) days of the drawing, in written form. They shall be placed before the Scholarship Committee for review and shall be answered in writing within fifteen (15) days.
- ◇ These rules governing the Western Michigan Area Local Scholarship Program can only be amended, changed, or deleted once a year at the November membership meeting and will take effect for the next scholastic year.

The above rules have been properly voted upon by the General Membership at the November 2009 General Membership Meeting.



**Western Michigan Area Local #281
American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO**

PO Box 2706; Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2706
GMF: Phone: (616) 776-1489; Fax: (616) 776-1536
P-Campus: Phone: (616) 977-1050; Fax (616) 977-1020



James A. Sweeney Memorial Scholarship Application

The application submission deadline is not later than March 17, 2025

Mail to: WMAL; Attn: James A. Sweeney Scholarship; PO Box 2706; Grand Rapids, MI 49501

Applicant's Information

Have you filed a financial aid statement with the financial aid office applying for financial aid? Yes No

Scholarship Applicant's Name: _____

Applicant's Home Address: _____

Applicant's Home Phone Number: _____

Applicant's High School: _____

APWU Member (Sponsor's) Information

Have you been a member of the Western Michigan Area Local for over one year? Yes No

Parent or Guardian's Name: _____ Craft: _____

Work Location / Office Pay Location: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Work Phone Number: _____

WMAL Office Information (To be completed by the Scholarship Committee)

Date of Postmark on Application: _____ Verified by: _____

Membership Verification of One Year prior to submission? Yes No Verified by: _____

Drawing Number Application is Assigned: _____

WMAL Retiree Chapter Update ***By Ray Novakoski, President***

Our chapter is progressing and expanding, and we extend a warm welcome to our new members while expressing gratitude to our existing members for their unwavering support.

We have some updates from the local union: President Michelle Mack resigned effective September 20, 2024, and Mike Long has assumed the role of President. Congratulations Mike. I attended the union meeting on October 5, 2024, and had a productive conversation with Mike, who assured me of his intention to involve retirees more in the local events and activities.

As you have probably heard the Social Security Fairness Act has passed and in December President Biden signed it into law. The law affects CSRS employees only, and not FERS, who have been penalized for many years. You will now get full social security benefits if you are eligible. You will also get back pay back to January 2024, only problem is that it will definitely take awhile for Social Security to figure it out but it will get done.



It is with great sadness that I announce the passing of George Hendricks, our Past President and the founder of the WMAL Retiree Chapter, on October 23, 2024. George was deeply committed to union and veterans' issues. I attended his funeral to convey our condolences to his family on behalf of the local and state chapters, and we donated to the DAV organization in his memory.

Our next meeting is on February 11, 2025, at 11 AM at the union hall, 2554 Burlingame SW, Wyoming, I. We are still in need of a Recording Secretary for the chapter, so if you can help out let me know.

I'm looking forward to seeing you there for light refreshments and engaging discussions with fellow retirees.

Ray

**Deadline - for the Next Edition of
the WMAL Voice is:
March 31, 2025**

*Looking for answers? Make sure to check out:
WWW.WMAL.ORG*

To review:

 *Meeting Minutes*

 *Contact information for stewards and officers*

 *Job bids and awards*

 *Upcoming events*

and so much more!

Also join our Facebook Page/Group!

Union Meetings

Next General Membership:

March 1, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

April 5, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

WMAL Retiree Chapter Meetings
are held at the Union Hall on the second Tuesday in
February, April, June, September and November -
starting at 11:00 a.m.

February 11th

April 8th

June 10th

September 9th

November 11th

Veterans Information

On Veterans Day 2022, the National Park Service unveiled a lifetime pass providing free entrance to national parks for Veterans and their families. The Interagency Military Lifetime Pass waives entrance fees for the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and standard amenity recreation fees for the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sites for current military service members and their dependents, Veterans and Gold Star Families.

Veterans and their families have free access to approximately 2,000 public locations spread out across more than 400 million acres of public lands, which host activities to fit any lifestyle—from serene to high octane, including hiking, fishing, paddling, biking, hunting, stargazing, camping, and much more.

The Military Pass has been expanded to include a pass that does not expire for Veterans and Gold Star Family members. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2022 authorized a free lifetime pass to national parks and other federal recreational lands for eligible Veterans and Gold Star Families. In recent years, they were able to receive annual passes.

Are you eligible? For purposes of this program, a Veteran is identified as an individual who has served in the United States Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserve, and is able to present one of the following forms of valid (unexpired) identification:

- ◇ Department of Defense Identification Card
- ◇ Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
- ◇ Veteran ID Card
- ◇ Veterans designation on a state-issued U.S. driver’s license or identification card

Gold Star Families are next of kin of a member of the United States Armed Forces who lost his or her life in a “qualifying situation,” such as a war, an international terrorist attack, or a military operation outside of the United States while serving with the United States Armed Forces.

The America the Beautiful – the National Parks and Federal

The infographic is titled "WHICH INTERAGENCY PASS IS RIGHT FOR ME?" and is part of the "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL" campaign. It provides a flowchart to help users determine which pass is best for them based on their status. Key criteria include:

- Annual Pass:** For U.S. citizens/permanent residents aged 16-64 or international visitors.
- Volunteer Pass:** For federal land volunteers who have completed 200 hours of service.
- Senior Annual Pass:** For U.S. citizens/permanent residents aged 62 or older.
- Military Lifetime Pass:** For U.S. citizens/permanent residents who are Gold Star Family members or Veterans.
- Military Annual Pass:** For U.S. citizens/permanent residents who are currently serving in the military or are dependents.
- Senior Lifetime Pass:** For U.S. citizens/permanent residents aged 62 or older with a medically determined permanent disability.
- Access Pass:** For U.S. citizens/permanent residents with a medically determined permanent disability.
- 4th Grade Pass:** For U.S. students in the 4th grade or those with school equivalent.

 The infographic also includes a note that the Access Pass waives federal agency and high-quality experience fees. At the bottom, it says "store.usgs.gov".

Recreational Lands Pass (Interagency Pass) Program

The Interagency Pass Program includes a free annual pass for active-duty members of the U.S. Military and their dependents. Current Military service members must show a valid (unexpired) Department of Defense ID. Dependents of current service members must show a valid (unexpired) DD Form 1173 AD or DEC.

Other free or discounted passes, including some lifetime passes, are available for persons with permanent disabilities, fourth grade students, volunteers and senior citizens age 62 years or older.

How to get your Interagency Pass? Interagency Passes can be obtained in person while visiting a participating site. Or just google Interagency Pass to find information .For more information about eligibility and passes, visit Free Entrance to National Parks for Veterans and Gold Star Families (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov).

The National Park Service in partnership with Operation Live Well would like to thank military personnel and their families for their service and invite them to enjoy their national parks. The free Military Pass is a way to thank current US military members and their dependents, Gold Star Families, and US military veterans for their support of our country and to encourage them to explore recreational opportunities on their public lands and waters.

What is the Military, Veterans, and Gold Star Family Free Access Program? Current US military and dependents, Gold Star Families, and US military veterans are eligible to receive free annual or lifetime passes which cover entrance or day use fees at national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, and other federal recreational lands.

Does the pass include others traveling with the veteran or Gold Star Family member? The free Military Lifetime Pass admits the veteran or the holder of the Gold Star Family voucher as well as occupants of a single, private non-commercial vehicle OR the veteran or voucher-holder and three persons (16 and older) where per person fees are charged. The passes are non-transferable and are void if altered.

How long will free access be available? Veterans and Gold Star Families receive free lifetime access.

What is not covered by the free Military Pass program? The pass does not cover expanded amenity fees such as camping, tours or special recreation permits; reservation fees and fees for organized groups or concession-operated facilities or activities.

What if I have a current Interagency Military Pass or other type of Interagency Pass? If you already have a Military Pass, Access Pass, or one of the other Interagency Passes, you can simply use that pass for free access.

If you have recently purchased an Interagency Annual or Senior Pass, unfortunately no refunds are permitted. All Interagency Passes are non-transferable.

Associate Office Scuttle

By Dana McLean -

Steward @ Newygo & Grant & MPWU Clerk Craft Director

Management's Harassment -
What It Is and What You Can Do About It?

Harassment by a postmaster or supervisor is, unfortunately, something many postal workers deal with at some point. It can create a toxic workplace, increase stress, and make it harder for you to do your job. But you don't have to accept this kind of behavior—it's not just wrong; it's a violation of your rights as a postal worker and union member.

Harassment isn't just yelling or name-calling. It can also include:

- ◇ Micromanaging: Constantly watching your every move, criticizing minor things, or making it impossible to meet unrealistic expectations.
- ◇ Intimidation: Threats of discipline or job loss for reasons that aren't justified.
- ◇ Retaliation: Punishing you for filing a grievance or speaking up about workplace issues.
- ◇ Favoritism: Treating certain employees better than others, which creates unfair working conditions.
- ◇ Workplace bullying: Using sarcasm, insults, or ridicule to belittle you in front of others.

If any of this sounds familiar, it's not "just part of the job." No one deserves to be treated this way.

Why It Happens? Harassment often happens because some managers think fear is the best way to control employees. They might also target union members or stewards who stand up for coworkers. Whatever the reason, harassment violates the basic principles of respect and fairness in the workplace—and it's against our contract.

Your Rights as a Postal Worker - The APWU contract includes protections against harassment and hostile work environments. As union members, we have the right to:

- ◆ Work without being intimidated, threatened, or bullied.
- ◆ Be treated fairly, regardless of personal differences or union involvement.
- ◆ File grievances if management violates these rights.

Federal laws, like the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), also require a safe workplace—free from harassment or abuse.



What You Can Do? If you're being harassed, don't stay silent. You have options:

- 1) Document Everything! Write down every incident—include dates, times, witnesses, and what was said or done. The more detailed your notes, the stronger your case will be.
- 2) Speak Up! Let your union steward (or another trusted APWU representative) know what's happening. They can guide you on how to handle the situation and file a grievance if necessary.
- 3) File a Grievance! Harassment is a contract violation. Filing a grievance holds management accountable and sends a message that this behavior won't be tolerated.
- 4) Seek Support! Harassment can take a toll on your mental health. Talk to your family, friends, or even a professional counselor if needed. Many Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) offer free and confidential help.

How the Union Can Help? The APWU is here to fight for your rights. When harassment happens, the union steps in to hold management accountable, enforce the contract, and push for a safe, respectful workplace. Remember, when you stand up against harassment, you're not just helping yourself—you're protecting all of us.

Postmaster harassment isn't something you have to face alone. The union has your back, and together, we can make sure our workplace is one where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. If you're dealing with harassment, reach out to your steward today.

On another note, the strength of our union comes from its members, people like you. When more members get involved, we have a louder voice to fight for our rights. Simply coming to the meetings is one way of getting involved. We have around 700 members in our local and we barely have 30 members come to the meeting. If you have issues with mgmt. or even questions you need answered, the monthly meeting is the place to address it.

Dana

(Continued from page 3) - Long and Short of It continued...

you can go on the floor and watch this machine and that machine where one of the partners went outside for a smoke break, or went to the office to fill out their paperwork, or such, and the other partner is left running the machine by themselves. This leads into the second reason one can refuse: 2 – a Strongly held belief (Religious). The Supreme Court has ruled (and as a side note, give them time and they will probably reverse this decision as well) that an employee can refuse a direction if that direction goes a strongly held belief. With that said, let me caveat this – if you refuse a direction because of this, you better make sure you NEVER deviate. (e.g. You can't work Sunday because you have to go to church, but then you bid on a job that includes working on Sunday. Where is the strongly held belief then.)

City of Grand Rapids Taxes. You need to check with your Tax Preparer on this one. But I was told this piece of information and thought I would share. If you work in Grand Rapids (or another city that has a tax structure) but don't live in that city, generally you can deduct those days that you didn't work /reside in the city and not have to pay taxes on it. What I was told, they already give you a standard deduction for the "weekends"/your two SDOs. However, then I was told that you could possibly deduct your Sick Leave, Annual Leave, LWOP, etc. that you took, since you weren't in the city. Like I said, check with your tax preparer and make sure the information is correct. I know I will be checking on it, and if it is correct, that could be some savings.

Eagle Clean – check out the January/February 2025 edition of the APWU Magazine for more information. But for those who don't know, Eagle Clean is a new automated way for custodians in the stations to input their duties into a scanner instead of using a paper 4776, along with other tasks. The only thing I want to touch on here is: The APWU, or the local, did NOT agree with or condoned the implementation of Eagle Clean. Right now, they are only implementing this in offices (Function 4) where they have a custodian. From the last information I have received, they are not rolling it out to the plants as of yet.

Scholarships – the deadline for the WMAL James Sweeney Scholarship is due by March 17. Check out this edition of the WMAL Voice for an Application or go to the local's website.

TSP Contributions – IRS has announced new limits for 2025. The new limit for contributions is \$23,500. Last year it was 23k. Employees 50 and older can contribute an additional \$7.5k; and those 60 – 63 years old can contribute a total of \$11,250 in catch-up contributions. Remember that the Postal Service will only match up to 5%. Any additional is not matched. If you are not at least contributing 5% to your TSP, you are not getting all the money you can. All new employees hired since 2009 automatically contribute 3%, and if you haven't already done so, go on PostalEase and raise it to 5% at a minimum.

REAL ID – If you haven't already done so, starting May 7, 2025, your driver's license or state issued ID must be a REAL ID if you plan to fly within the United States. To see if you have it already, in Michigan, look at the upper right-hand corner of your license. If there is a "star" then your license has been updated to the new standard. If it doesn't, and you wish to fly, you will need/be required to bring another form of identification (passport) with you. Real ID licenses also have numerous security features embedded in the card. You need a special light to view them though.

During this time of the year, while most are fully aware how hectic it becomes here at work, we must never forget to focus on why we are here -- to provide for ourselves and for our family. As I have told many of you during orientations and when we talk, the first and foremost about working is to make a living for ourselves and our family - nothing more, nothing less. Please do not lose sight of this. All too often now we become agitated with our fellow coworkers or management, and in turn, we lash out (either verbally or physically). This in turn causes stress upon you and your family because you are sometimes now without a steady paycheck coming in (while we go through the grievance process); which is never a sure-fire bet on its' outcome. If you find yourself becoming stressed or on the edge, I would strongly recommend calling EAP, or talking to a confident (someone you can trust). At a minimum, defuse the situation by removing yourself from any possible state that might cause you to "lose your cool." If you need to talk to someone immediately, call 1-800-EAP-4-YOU (327-4968) and speak to a counselor. If we have a steward available, ask to see one.

Mike

Are You Getting All You Deserve?

Live the Dream in a Level 18 –

By: At the Counter (Reprinted from other PPA publications: The Northern Lights via The Badger Bulletin)

FACT: The Post Office will never pay you extra. They will pay up to or less than the amount you are entitled to, but never more. The question is: How much are you allowing your employer to pay you? Our contract maps everything out, wages, hours and working conditions. How things are done, who does what, when, and how they do it. It also spells out how much Clerks should be paid for the work that is covered by the CBA (Collective Bargaining Agreement). (NOTE: We are not asking for enrichment beyond what the contract/JCIM affords, we are asking that are we being paid properly?)

Article 19, Handbooks and Manuals ties everything together. “Those parts of all handbooks, manuals and published regulations of the Postal Service, that directly relate to wages, hours or working conditions they apply to employees covered by this Agreement...” are part of the contract.

A question every Clerk (employee) needs to ask is: “Am I receiving all the money and benefits that I have earned?” Take a moment to think about your situation and your office.

- ◆ **Schedule:** Is the clerk schedule posted every Wednesday and is it accurate?
- ◆ **OTDL:** Is there an Overtime Desired List posted in your office? Is your name on it?
- ◆ **Leave/3971s:** Do you and your supervisor fill out and

use PS Form 3971 for all Sick Leave and Annual Leave requests?

- ◆ **Uniforms:** Do you wear the correct USPS uniform and are you getting the correct uniform allowance.
- ◆ **Breaks:** Do you take ALL of your breaks and lunches?
- ◆ **Union Bulletin Board:** Is there one in your office? If not, get one today.
- ◆ **Higher Level Pay:** Is Higher Level pay being given to the clerks in your office? Why or why not? Is the 15-hour BUW rule followed? Do you monitor who is doing what work and when your supervisor is claiming to be doing Clerk Craft Work?
- ◆ **Crossing Crafts:** Are other crafts doing Clerk work? Unfortunately, many supervisors in Level 18 offices either do not know, claim to be too busy, or are too lazy to do their jobs and comply with the contract.

Bottom Line: When our contract is not followed, you and the other APWU Clerks are the ones who lose.

Let your steward or union representative know if your office is doing everything according to our contract, and especially if they are not. When the contract is followed, you get all the pay and benefits that you have earned!

HALL RENTAL INFORMATION for APWU MEMBERS & the GENERAL PUBLIC 2554 Burlingame Ave SW; Wyoming, Michigan 49509

Rental Rates/Breakdown <small>(as of January 1, 2015)</small>	WMAL Member <small>(Active & Retiree*)</small>	Non-Profit <small>(Meetings Only (no events))</small>	General Public
Security Deposit: <small>(Must be returned if hall is cleaned after rental and no damage found)</small>	\$300	None	\$400
Agent Fee:	None	None	\$100
Hall Rental Fee:	\$350	\$150	\$1000
Total Amount:	\$650	\$150	\$1500

*Retirees must be a member of the APWU local retiree chapter to receive rate. Member must be present throughout the entire event (including setup).

Updated Non-Member List - This list is current as of January 25, 2025 downloaded from the APWU National membership files. If you see a name on this list who shouldn't be listed here (they are a member, or thought they were a member), please contact your steward or officer and let them know so they can ensure the list is updated. Just remember has a \$50 membership bounty for each new member signed up.



Western Michigan Area Local #281
American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO
 PO Box 2706, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2706
 GME Phone: (616) 776-1489; Fax: (616) 776-1536
 P-Campus Phone: (616) 977-1050; Fax: (616) 977-1020



Non-Member List

The below named co-workers are eligible for membership in the Western Michigan Area Local. Show and provide them with the benefits of belonging to the local and to the APWU. The local offers every member/organizer who signs up a non-member/coworker \$50 for each person they sign-up and join.

Clerks in the Grand Rapids Installation (495)

Career

David Abraczinskas	Ali Ahmed	Jennifer Baadke	Lucas Baadke
Tia Bibler	Toni Blais-Hoyle	Brian Boss	Justin Braun
Steven Carlson	Darus Clark	Sopita Decharat	Tabitha Edmonds
Jenetta Epps	Robert Flikkema	Cheryl Fryling	Nicole Hodges
Michael Hoven	Darnell Johnson	Rick Manning	Eliel Martinez
Melissa McMillan	Tamara McNabb	Kaila Morrill	Ronda Myers
Teyarra Nathan	Matthew Piccolo	Richard Prideits	Michael Rusky
Wesley Schafer	Richard Shimmin	Cody Stallings	Nathan Stevens
Robbin Stevenson	Richard Velasquez	David Verkade	Michelle Webb
Robert Wisner			

Postal Support Employees (PSEs) - Grand Rapids Installation

Savannah Baker	Margaret Botek	Brendan Conners	Mirela Gaita
Cameron Hathaway	Joshua Holley	Nicole Hughes	Kristine Johnson
Eriel Mutoagoma	Jared Prosser	David Ross	Blake Sandee
Sonya Todd	Michael VanMeter		

Motor Vehicle Service (TTO & VMF) in Grand Rapids Installation

James Gleason	Jerred Thill	Lee Wright	Thomas Zehm
Scott Schneider	David VanderPloeg	Moses Kil	Latricia Childs

Maintenance in Grand Rapids Installation

David Chiodo	Erin Crowner	John Cushman	Charles Goedken
Todd Jordan	Denise Karbutowski	Donald Merchant	Shawn Palmer
Darrick Scott-Farnsworth		Amber Wiley	Diane Williams

Associate Offices (493/494)

Ada - Teresa Morgan **Big Rapids** - Edwin Courser; Alyssa Paez; Charlotte Ward
Blanchard - Kenneth Lau **Bradley** - Stephanie Cherveney **Branch** - Serena Collins
Comstock Park - Jeremy Aldrich **Dorr** - Kevin My **Fennville** - Barbara Hahn **Fountain** - Debra Mohr
Free Soil - Toni Burke **Grand Haven** - Aiyanna Dixon; Dakota Mitchell **Hamilton** - Kimberly Hamm
Holland - Jason Auchtung; Warren Bismarck; Tyler Cheek; Morgan Dopp; Samantha Fealy; Jamie Inthisanc
Holland - Eugene Marciniak; Deanna Runions; Craig Underly; Bryon Warren **Howard City** - Penny Sapp
Hudsonville - Austin VanderLaan **Jenison** - Jerry Arens **Lowell** - Jessica Bradley ; Sage Kramer
Mecosta - Julie Guthrie **Moline** - Janine Rairgh **Morely** - Meredith Linder **Nunica** - Jordan Davis
New Era - Steven Knoblauch **Paris** - Olivia Whitcomb **Scottville** - Ashlee Parks
Rockford - Benjamin Wheaton **Rothbury** - Nannette Bellairs **Shelby** - Hope Ernst; Roxann Vaniaan
Sand Lake - Valarie Mour **Sparta** - Marie Bart **Walhalla** - Brian Melvin
West Olive - Shirely Sukes ; Audra Warrick **Zeeland** - Matt Locher; Linda Hagger

Turney at the Table

By Linda Turney, National Business Agent - Clerk Craft



Now that the elections are over, we have our work cut out for us. The reduce Federal government people are in charge. Under the Biden/Harris administration, the NLRB had aggressively pursued pro-worker reforms such as making changes that made it easier for workers to form Unions and discouraging employers from violating federal labor laws. In the last few years, we have seen union's win organizing drives at The Art Institute and the Shedd Aquarium. At the U. of C., grad students first voted to unionize in 2017 but withdrew because the Trump administration argued they did not have a right to organize. Under the Biden labor board, they filed for a union election again and won in a landslide.

For us, as federal employees that represent a Union, we too will deal with a hostile NLRB. In Trump's first term, he openly advocated for privatization of the postal service. Trump proposed sweeping changes to the USPS such as cutting costs by delivering mail fewer days per week to central locations instead of your home. Trump appointed DeJoy who has raised the price of stamps and cut the cost of proper staffing at the window and on the distribution floor. The price of stamps has increased 5 times in the last two years. In July 2024, the 5-cent increase was one of the largest increases ever. DeJoy plans to raise the price of stamps 5 times through 2027. These rate hikes result in a decline in mail volume and loss of revenue.

October 1 and ends the following year on September 30.

- **Mail Volume Declines:** Rate hikes have contributed to driving steep declines in mail volume. Mail volume is the total number of pieces of mail delivered. **Annual volume since 2020 has declined by 13 billion pieces, or 10%.**
- **Service:** Just 83% of first-class mail was delivered on time in the beginning of 2024 compared to the DFA target of 95%. That's the **lowest service level in 3 years.**

This is unsustainable for the Postal Service and those who rely on us for their businesses and communications.

Let's pull together in our constant struggle to keep our business, representing the people of the

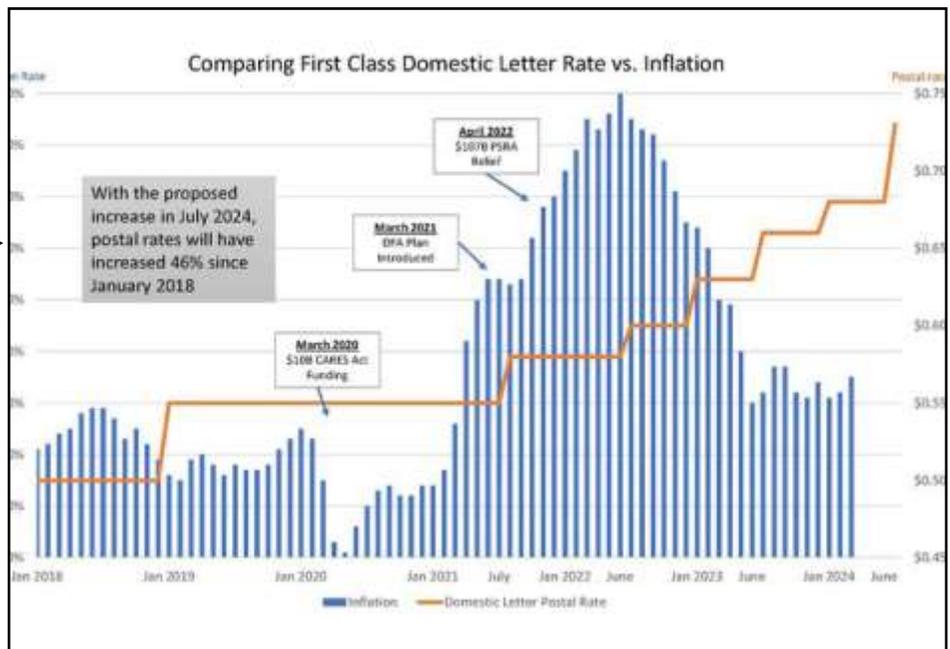
USPS alive and well. Be an activist by attending Union Meetings. Go to rallies that support our cause and work to improve the work place for all workers. Thank you for your Union membership. Thank you for all the good work that you do for our Union.

Linda

Charts from American Forestry and Paper <https://www.afandpa.org/news/2024/why-does-price-stamps-keep-increasing> indicate that Postage rates do not help the USPS and that they rates have risen faster than inflation. See the rate compared to inflation chart.

Meanwhile, USPS continues to suffer financial losses as well as service and operational issues. Here are a few examples:

- **Financial:** In FY2023, they **lost \$6.5 billion**. They are estimated to lose another \$6.3billion in FY 2024. The U.S. government's fiscal year starts on



New Health Flex-Spending Account Information

Inspira Financial sent out an email recently with the information on the new Flex Spending Plan they are administering for the USPS. If you haven't already done so, and you have money still remaining in the FSAFEDS account that we had the past few years, make sure you submit and use it. The money did NOT transfer to this account.

The email was longer, but pertinent information is herein:

Inspira Financial is the third-party administrator of the USPS flexible spending account (FSA) program. To access your account information, use your funds, check the status of reimbursements, and upload documentation, they recommend you do the following:

If you enrolled in a Health FSA account, you'll receive your Inspira card in the mail soon. If you need additional debit cards for your spouse or dependents, you can order them through the Flexible Spending Account icon on liteblue.usps.gov (at no cost to you) or by calling the number on the back of your Inspira Card. The use of the Inspira Card is optional; however, if you do use the card, you may be required to substantiate expenses charged to the card. If you fail to do so, it could result in tax consequences. FSA transactions generally require substantiation, which means submitting required documentation proving that the transaction was for an eligible expense.

However, the following debit card transactions typically do not require substantiation:

- * IIAS-Approved Expense: Eligible prescription or over-the-counter items at a grocery store, discount store, or drugstore that is an IIAS merchant.
- * Copay Matching: The FSA expense matches a specific copay under your employer's medical, vision, or dental plan.
- * Recurring Expense: Once an expense has been approved, subsequent expenses at the same medical office, for the same amount, are automatically approved as a recurring expense.
- * Electronic File: In some situations, your health, dental, or vision plan will send your claim information electronically to Inspira.

You may use your Inspira Card for: copays, coinsurance, and deductibles; eligible dental and vision expenses; prescriptions and over-the-counter health care supplies from select retailers. (the first two bullet points above). However, if documentation/substantiation is required, Inspira will send out a request for documentation for your card transactions on a monthly schedule. (So, **SAVE YOUR RECEIPTS AND DOCUMENTS**)

THIS IS IMPORTANT!! After you receive the first letter, you will have approximately two (2) months to substantiate those card transactions. This includes providing receipts and/or documentation to support your charge. If you fail to respond timely, your card will be suspended.

During the time your card is suspended, you may still submit claims via the mobile app or you can submit a completed Flexible Spending Account Claim Form along with proper supporting documentation online or by mail to Inspira Financial Health, Inc. PO BOX 2495 Omaha, NE 68103.

If you prefer not to use your Inspira Card, you still have the option to pay your provider directly from your account or you can submit a completed Flexible Spending Account Claim Form along with proper supporting documentation online, by mail, or through the mobile app.

To check your balance, submit claims, pay a provider, etc., you have two options:

- ⇒ Website (<https://inspirafinancial.com/business/health-benefits/health-care-fsa>)
- ⇒ Inspira Mobile App

Click on the Flexible Spending Account icon via liteblue.usps.gov and select **Help & Support** to email or chat with them. Or call **833-419-0305 (TTY: 711)**.

Their offices are open Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. CT, and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. CT.



Western Michigan Area Local
American Postal Workers Union
PO Box 2706
Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2706

Address Service Requested



APWU National Contract Negotiations Info

President Mark Dimondstein updates members on the status of contract negotiations with USPS management, including new factor such as the NALC tentative agreement. The APWU will continue to keep the members updated as we continue to bargain for a new union contract, including regular messages on the negotiation “hotline” at (202) 642-9049, our website (apwu.org), and on our social media channels.

