



STATEMENT BY

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UPON THE
OPENING OF NEGOTIATIONS
WITH THE
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

WASHINGTON, D.C.
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On behalf of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union and the 55,000 Mail Handlers that our Union represents, we are pleased to be here in the Benjamin Franklin Room to open 2022 negotiations with the Postal Service. Although we expect a difficult round of bargaining, the NPMHU is committed to making every reasonable effort to reach an agreement that is good for our members, good for the Postal Service, and good for the American mailing public.

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The Postal Service certainly is facing continuing challenges, some caused by economic conditions, others by decline in mail volumes, and still others by technological changes.

When the parties previously negotiated in 2011, 2016 and 2019, the Postal Service was seeking substantial reductions in labor costs from bargaining unit employees represented by the Mail Handlers Union, including substantial numbers of non-career employees earning less money and having fewer benefits than career employees. Some of those proposals actually were achieved by the Postal Service during those negotiations, especially from a 2013 interest arbitration award. Based on these fundamental changes in our workforce, the Postal Service has reduced its overall labor costs for mail handling activities, and many of those reductions, including a revised wage scale for future career employees, are now scheduled to continue into the future. The fact is that this revised wage scale has resulted in several

unintended consequences. The wage scales, as currently constituted, are badly broken and have created major inequities in pay and have barely provided a living wage for those employees at the lower steps of the scale. This makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to recruit and retain new employees in the Mail Handler craft.

The national recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the return of the American economy to a pattern of normal growth, should mean a return to more normalized collective bargaining. This should be a time for the parties to agree on a period of relatively stable labor relations, without the massive disruptions and dislocations caused by the unwarranted closing of mail processing facilities and by unnecessary subcontracting or privatization.

The Mail Handlers Union remains deeply committed to the negotiating process. Certainly, the NPMHU will continue to work with the Postal Service to address extraordinary circumstances. Mail Handlers, as essential workers, reported to work every day during the pandemic, putting their own health and that of their families at risk. Through several Memoranda of Understanding, the Mail Handlers Union provided the Postal Service with the additional staffing it needed during the pandemic. The NPMHU worked with the Postal Service to provide hundreds of millions of COVID test kits to the American public. The NPMHU worked with the Postal Service to ensure that our nation's elections were conducted efficiently and fairly.

We now expect the Postal Service to work with the NPMHU to negotiate a contract that rewards Mail Handlers for the hard work and dedication that we have exhibited during the past difficult years. We expect, and will demand, that the Postal Service engage in good faith bargaining on all issues that are properly the subject of mutual bargaining.

Today obviously is neither the time nor the place for discussing specific proposals. Not only are formal negotiations just beginning, but the Mail Handlers Union does not believe it is productive to negotiate in public, in the newspapers, or in the halls of Congress.

Nonetheless, the goals of the National Postal Mail Handlers Union in this year's round of bargaining can be stated simply. We seek a negotiated agreement that corrects a wage scale that is badly broken; we seek an agreement that protects our jobs and improves our standard of living; we seek a negotiated contract that improves the status of all Mail Handlers, be they long-term and dedicated employees who have devoted their work lives to the Postal Service or Mail Handler Assistants, who are our newest members and the Postal Service's future career employees; we seek a contract that minimizes the dislocation and inconvenience to Mail Handlers whose careers may be involuntarily disrupted by excessing or downsizing; and we seek to stop future subcontracting and return currently outsourced work to the Mail Handler craft.

In short, we seek practical solutions to the problems faced by Mail Handlers, so that working together we can ensure that the Postal Service and all its Mail Handler employees can continue to provide the American public with the service that they have come to expect.

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In closing, let me state that the National Postal Mail Handlers Union seeks to obtain a fair and just settlement with the Postal Service. We understand that these negotiations will be difficult. But if management makes reasonable proposals and counterproposals at the bargaining table, we certainly will recommend ratification to our membership. We also hope for and expect the same attitude from postal management – that reasonable proposals from the Union will be met with acceptance. If both parties are able to adopt this approach to bargaining, I remain optimistic that we will be able to reach a negotiated settlement.

Thank you very much.