



NALC **Fact Sheet**

Department of Legislative and Political Affairs — National Association of Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO
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Improving Access to Workers' Compensation for Injured Federal Workers Act (H.R. 3170)

Postal employees account for nearly half of the claims made to the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs each year, and letter carriers file a majority of these claims. The physical and outdoor nature of the letter carrier job heightens these workers' risk of injury. In fact, letter carriers get injured more frequently than nearly all other workers in the federal government or in private industry. When letter carriers are injured on the job, it is critical for them to receive the care they need from their chosen provider.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the country injured letter carriers live in areas where there is a shortage of physicians who will treat injured federal workers. The Department of Labor is well aware of this problem and even calls these areas "provider deserts." And while there are many nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants/physician associates (PAs) in these areas who are willing to see and treat injured federal workers, the DOL does not accept medical reports or evidence from them for purposes of accepting and administering claims.

This bill would expand care options for federal employees, including letter carriers, who are injured on the job by amending the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) to allow NPs and PAs to prescribe or recommend treatment for injured federal

workers; certify the nature of an injury and probable extent of disability; and provide prescribed treatment for injured federal workers. In general, only physicians may fulfill these roles under current law.

The proposed bill also reflects the changing reality of the US healthcare system. Increasingly, federal employees already choose PAs and NPs as their health care provider under the Federal Employees Health Benefit Program, especially in rural communities. Maintaining this care can give patients a sense of familiarity and comfort when seeking treatment for a workplace injury. This bill would increase the number of eligible providers for workers' compensation cases, making it easier for injured federal workers to access the care they need.

The relationship between patient and provider should be one of trust that ensures proper treatment and rehabilitation. In addition, timely continuity of treatment is essential for recovery. The longer appropriate treatment is delayed, the less likely injured workers are to make a successful recovery and return to work. Expanding the options for care ensures that patients will be able to see a provider they know and trust and that there will be no gaps in treatment.

NALC supports H.R. 3170, which would expand care options for letter carriers and all federal employees who are injured on the job by allowing PAs and NPs to treat workers' compensation cases.

Sponsored by Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI) and Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT)