



## American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO

1300 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005

**Vance Zimmerman**  
Industrial Relations Director

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202-842-4273 (Office)  
202-371-0992 (Fax)

**To APWU National, State and Local Officers:**

### **Update from IRD Vance Zimmerman on COVID Family First Leave**

#### **& Next Steps:**

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, dedicated postal workers have been courageously on the frontlines. The APWU national leadership continues to focus on protecting the health and safety of our members. Early in the pandemic we worked on securing proper PPE, new cleaning and safety protocols, physical protections for window clerks, a series of "COVID Memorandums" including increased leave for non-career employees and secured a management COVID "liberal leave" policy. With the continuing surge of the disease and record numbers of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths, the APWU remains deeply concerned and vigilant.

Congress provided some additional protection to help slow the spread of the disease and help protect the health of workers, by passing the Family First Coronavirus Recovery Act (FFCRA) which provided up to 14 days of paid "COVID related" leave.

However, "Family First" leave expired on December 31, 2020 when Congress failed to renew it. While it is no longer current law postal management has the option, and we believe the responsibility, to continue to abide by the "Family First" principles and grant paid "administrative" leave for those off work due to exposure or diagnosis of COVID, regardless of where the exposure may have taken place.

After numerous efforts and discussions with management, they have refused to do so. Management has taken the position and issued a "decision tree" that administrative leave will only be automatically paid if the employee contracted the disease in the workplace and in all other situations the employee must use their own personal leave. Despite much progress and positive results over the last year between the national parties in addressing

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COVID related health & safety concerns, the APWU is at loggerheads with management on this issue. It is a disturbing signal that the safety and health of the employees and our families is taking a back seat to “business.” Postal employees have been deemed as not only “essential” — but *expendable*. *And it is even more egregious when one considers that the APWU and other postal unions were instrumental in securing \$10 billion in Congressional emergency relief to the USPS in part to cover the increased expenses of protecting the health and safety of postal workers.*

Postal management has the responsibility under the union Collective Bargaining Agreement to protect the safety of all employees. Article 14 states, “It is the responsibility of management to provide safe working conditions in all present and future installations.” (My emphasis)

As this important battle continues, we recommend the following for any postal worker that has been exposed to COVID-19, is experiencing symptoms, or been diagnosed as COVID positive/presumptive positive:

- Follow the USPS policy as outlined in a multitude of stand-up talks, policy documents, and statements and stay home from work.
- Follow the USPS policy and report the diagnosis, exposure, or symptoms to the USPS.
- When reported, workers should ask management what next steps to take.
- When management initiates the action that the employee cannot report to work, workers should ask whether they will be placed on administrative leave.
- If management instructs and compels workers to use their own leave (sick or annual) a grievance should be filed documenting the fact circumstances of each case, including the date when management was notified, management response, name (s) of management officials involved and when and how exposure happened. Grievances should be filed under Article 14 adding any safety and leave provisions of Article 19. The Article 14 contention is that management initiated a policy that employees not report to work due to COVID-19 related reasons. Further, the management policy of denying paid administrative leave is creating a dangerous workplace by encouraging employees to be in the work place and not report symptoms and exposure out of fear of not being properly paid. As a remedy request administrative leave, replacement of any used sick or annual, payment of LWOP when used and that management cease and desist the unsafe policy and practice.

In short order I will be sharing a “template” local grievance. As we battle this critical issue out with postal management, the APWU is also hard at work in the legislative arena to restore the provisions of “Family First” Act. We are also pursuing every avenue to ensure high priority of

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vaccine availability for postal workers. We continue to promote and advocate for the mandatory wearing of masks as a basic health and safety measure. We are constantly pressing management to implement pilot programs on “thermal” testing in the workplace. We have organized an upcoming webinar on OWCP issues related to COVID.

We will continue to keep you updated on these many fronts as things develop. We cannot thank every one of you enough for your efforts in the critical fight for health and safety.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vance Zimmerman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vance Zimmerman  
Industrial Relations Director

VZ/CC:jm  
OPEIU#2 | AFL-CIO