

# 4 workers dead at Palmetto: The safety crisis, the privatization drive, and how postal workers can fight back

USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee  
10 June 2026

*On Sunday, June 14, the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online public meeting: “4 workers dead at Palmetto—The consequence of decades of cuts and the drive to privatize USPS.” Register for the event here.*

## To all postal workers, retirees and the communities we serve:

The United States Postal Service (USPS) is under the most serious attack in its 250-year history. Under the pretext of a manufactured financial crisis, Postmaster General David Steiner, Congress and the Trump administration are preparing to slash jobs, cut services and end USPS’s existence as a public service—putting it instead at the beck and call of corporate America.

In fact, cuts to the post office have gone on for decades, and workers are bearing the cost with their lives. Four workers have died at the Palmetto Regional Processing and Distribution Center in the past two years. The most recent is Demarcus Little, a 45-year-old father of two, who told a supervisor he was not feeling well, collapsed and died.

We urge our coworkers to support his family and friends during this very difficult time.

These were not simply tragic accidents but the lethal results of austerity. Preventing them requires an organized movement from below, not beholden to management, toothless regulatory agencies or corrupt union officials. The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee was formed and is fighting to prepare the ground for such a movement.

The first step is that every postal worker needs to know what is taking place. Here are the facts:

Testifying before the House Oversight Committee in March 2026, Steiner stated: “At our current rate we will be out of cash in less than 12 months. So in about a year from now the Postal Service will be unable to deliver the mail, if we continue the status quo.” Already, the USPS has frozen nonessential hiring, travel, training and purchasing across all departments. Most important, it is raiding workers’ pension plans by suspending payments into it.

On June 4, the Postal Regulatory Commission said this is enough to keep USPS going for “several years.” But this is only a down payment for a “permanent” solution, likely through an act of Congress.

At the May 8 Board of Governors meeting, Steiner called on

Congress “to remove the mandates that ensure the Postal Service loses money: For example, days and levels of service, the ability to close unprofitable offices, and the underpricing of First-Class Mail.” But 71 percent of delivery routes are “financially underwater,” meaning that access to mail across wide swaths of the country are under threat.

In fact, these cuts already began years ago under the “Delivering for America” (DFA) program. Under this plan’s goals, only 65 percent of non-urban residents would live within 30 miles of any mail facility. According to government figures, USPS has also shed 18,000 jobs since 2020.

The USPS is being converted into a last-mile contractor for private logistics companies. Last month, it announced an exclusive multi-year, \$10 billion-plus contract with DHL eCommerce, under which postal workers will handle final delivery of DHL packages nationwide. USPS already functions this way for Amazon in rural areas.

Demarcus Little’s death is part of a series of preventable deaths in which management negligence played a role. He is the fourth in two years at Palmetto alone, following

Russell Scruggs Jr (November 15, 2025)

Eric Smith (June 3, 2025)

Shannon Barnes (August 18, 2024)

Our independent inquiry, launched last November, has established significant delays in emergency care caused by: blocked cell phone signals, delaying 911 calls; a lack of first aid kits and training; and difficulties encountered by EMS entering the building. A source has informed us it has never operated with written safety protocols.

Palmetto is not some decrepit backwater. It is a new “state-of-the-art” facility, one of the first to come online in 2024 under the Delivering for America plan. That the conditions exist here for four workers to die shows what management has in store for the whole country.

In Detroit, only a week before Scruggs’ death, 36-year-old Nick Acker died after falling in a mail sorting machine; his body was not found for eight hours. OSHA has fined USPS \$26,481 for his death. At the Board of Governors meeting held days after Scruggs’ and Acker’s deaths, Steiner did not mention either worker, while boasting of cutting 12 million work-hours that fiscal year. “I do not see the need for a fundamental reassessment of our processing and logistics modernization strategies at this time,” he concluded.

Other recent incidents include:

- A worker in Duluth, Georgia who fell into a coma after inhaling particles from active construction work in the building;

•The death of Lucy Diaz, also in November 2025, at the Morgan PDC in New York;

•The heat-related deaths of letter carriers Jacob Taylor of Dallas and Dan Workman of Colorado.

USPS's requirement for self-funding, first imposed in 1970, has been the basis for decades of corporate-style cuts. Both parties are responsible. When Steiner testified before Congress in March, Republican chair Pete Sessions and Democratic ranking member Kweisi Mfume opened by praising both, with Sessions calling private industry as "the path forward" and Mfume demanding to know how USPS would "reduce costs."

Corporate America has wanted to privatize USPS for years. A Wells Fargo study in 2025 laid out "five required steps," some of which are already taking place. Steiner, a former board member of Fedex, was chosen specifically for his experience leading "a major private-sector company."

International experience shows what is coming here. The post offices of Britain and Germany were privatized years ago, and Canada Post plans to end door-to-door delivery and cut more than half of its workforce.

According to Challenger, Gray & Christmas, US companies announced more than 1.2 million layoffs in 2025, one of the highest levels on record. Aside from the AI-driven layoffs in the tech sector, the logistics industry has recorded the largest declines in jobs. UPS cut 48,000 jobs last year and is cutting 30,000 this year. Amazon says it hopes to hire half a million fewer workers because of AI; the auto industry is cutting shifts and whole factories and the federal government has axed more than 300,000 jobs under Trump.

Labor costs are being slashed in order to pay off unsustainable debt levels, fund financial speculation and pay for new wars. Next year's proposed military budget at \$1.5 trillion a year, while the USPS's \$9 billion annual loss last year amounts to little more than a week of spending on the war against Iran.

Rather than warning workers and organizing a fight against it, union officials are trying to lull them to sleep, calling Steiner's Congressional testimony "salacious" and exaggerated and that the solution was for workers to call their representatives in Congress. Their "solution" is to lift the agency's borrowing limits and allow it to invest pensions in the stock market, making the post office even more beholden to Wall Street.

The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) explicitly supported suspending pension payments and, before that, the Delivering for America restructuring. With the national contract having expired last month, President Brian Renfroe has announced the union is "fully prepared to use the interest arbitration process if necessary," a repeat of last year when arbitration was used to override a 70 percent contract rejection by members.

Union officials are also turning a blind eye to safety. APWU President Jonathan Smith issued an open letter of condolence almost immediately upon Nick Acker's death but then palmed off the investigation onto the USPS and toothless regulators. At a livestream on safety, he failed to mention his name.

The United States Postal Service was founded 250 years ago, with Benjamin Franklin as its first Postmaster General, on the understanding that a democratic republic required the universal circulation of newspapers, correspondence and political ideas. This basic principle is now under attack. Acting under a Trump executive order, USPS published a rule on June 2 that would allow it to refuse delivery of mail-in ballots, in violation of a 2021 federal court

settlement.

## How postal workers can fight back

The USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee calls on our coworkers to build rank-and-file committees at every workplace their workplaces, link those committees into a national network, and prepare collective action to defend jobs, wages, safety and the post office as a public institution.

We were founded in 2023 to act as a national center for workers to hold discussions outside of the control of both management and the union bureaucrats, advocate for an independent strategy and provide our coworkers with key information.

Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), we are affiliated with similar postal committees in Canada, Britain, Germany and Australia, as well as committees of autoworkers, teachers and others.

After Scruggs' and Acker's deaths last November, we launched an independent inquiry into workplace safety. It will continue to work to expose the truth behind Demarcus Little's death.

What we are advocating is not a petition campaign or a phone-banking drive. Rather, it is the development of a fighting organization, controlled democratically by workers themselves, campaigning to mobilize workers against the cuts and the entire framework behind it.

### We urge our coworkers to fight for the following demands:

• **No privatization of USPS, in whole or in part. USPS must remain a fully public institution, funded from public revenues like every other government service, with no requirement to generate profit.**

• **Workers' control over safety conditions at every facility to prevent management's cost-cutting from endangering more lives.**

• **No service cuts, no route eliminations, no post office closures. Six-day delivery to every address in the country is a public right, not a budget line item.**

• **No last-mile contracting with Amazon, DHL or any other private corporation that undermines the Universal Service Obligation.**

**Restore all suspended pension contributions immediately.**

• **Inflation-busting wage increases, including double-digit annual wage increases and full cost of living. End the two-tier pay structure. Move all City Carrier Assistants to full career status and full-time pay.**

• **End TIAREAP and RRECS. Full compensation for every worker who has suffered wage theft under RRECS.**

If you agree, then join us! Contact the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form below.



To contact the WWSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**