

USPS rural carrier kidnapped and murdered in North Carolina

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Brandi Byrd Reynolds, a 35-year-old USPS rural letter carrier, was kidnapped and murdered Friday, June 26, while delivering mail on her route in Hays, North Carolina.

Deputies responding to reports of a shooting found Reynolds dead inside her USPS vehicle on Montieth Acres Road. William Craig Durham, 56, of Roaring River, was arrested and charged with first-degree murder and first-degree kidnapping. Investigators allege Reynolds had been restrained and moved from one location to another without her consent before she was killed.

Reynolds' murder leaves her two young daughters orphaned. Her husband, Brent Andrew Reynolds, died only six months earlier, on December 23, when the truck he was driving ran off the road, struck a tree and overturned in Wilkes County. Brent Reynolds, also 35, died at the scene, according to the North Carolina Highway Patrol.

Customers on Reynolds' route described her as kind, caring, hardworking and attentive to the people she served. "It was always a joy to see her," one resident wrote, adding that Reynolds "never seemed to be without a smile." Another customer noted, "As my mail lady she was the best. She would take the time to talk." "Brandi was the sweetest, kindest, most generous and friendly young lady I have ever known," wrote another. "She was so kind after I had my many surgeries."

Rural carriers responded to Reynolds' death by sharing their own harrowing experiences on the job. A retired rural carrier in Atlanta told the WSWs, "People don't realize how dangerous it is for carriers." In winter, when it got dark earlier or when she delivered to cluster boxes behind buildings, she said she kept her mother or father on the phone "in case anything happened."

On social media, a Texas carrier near the Sam Houston National Forest wrote that "most of the time my GPS and phone don't work," and described having a gun pointed at her face during a medication delivery requiring a signature.

A retired Oklahoma carrier wrote, "Rural carriers are sometimes in secluded areas during delivery. I was one for 30 years in Oklahoma. I had some very sketchy areas I delivered in rural woodsy areas!" A former North Carolina rural carrier wrote, "It's scary when you have a package to deliver at the door and you go down a driveway that's a quarter of a mile

long with a 'no trespassing' sign with a gun on it."

Several carriers pointed to the danger of late delivery and the unpredictable nature of the job. One carrier who briefly delivered on an Oregon rural route wrote, "It was fine during daylight hours, but after dark when days are short in winter was stressful." Another wrote, "Our jobs are so freaking dangerous ... back roads all alone, often after dark and people know where we will be every freaking day."

The national rise in crimes against postal workers is part of a broader safety crisis. A May 2024 Government Accountability Office report found that serious crime cases against postal workers and postal property increased almost every year from Fiscal Year 2017 through Fiscal Year 2023. In Fiscal Year 2023 alone, USPS opened about 600 robbery cases, 400 assault cases, 200 burglary cases and two homicide cases involving on-duty postal employees. Yet the authorized postal inspector workforce had not increased, and postal police staffing remained 37 percent below its authorized level.

The growth of violence against postal workers is one expression of the broader social breakdown in America, where decades of job destruction, poverty, addiction, isolation and the collapse of public services have produced increasingly desperate and unstable conditions. Reynolds was killed in Wilkes County, in the foothills of northwestern North Carolina, where median household income is only \$53,189, per capita income is \$28,753, 15.5 percent of residents live below the official poverty line and only 17.3 percent of adults have a bachelor's degree.

The county has also been hit by a sharp deterioration in basic social conditions. A 2025 North Carolina state resilience profile found that total employment in Wilkes County fell by 2,409 jobs between 2017 and 2022, a decline of 10.7 percent. Over the same period, opioid deaths rose from 29.2 to 32.2 per 100,000 residents, while the number of nurses per 10,000 residents fell from 140 to 128. Violent crimes per 10,000 residents rose 17.4 percent over four years.

USPS management, however, is preparing to make this social crisis worse by threatening to close "unprofitable," mostly rural post offices. At a June Senate hearing on USPS finances, Postmaster General David Steiner identified the Postal Service's basic public obligations as the source of its financial

crisis, stating that 52 percent of rural delivery routes are “financially underwater,” adding that “in a normal business” such routes would be adjusted or stores closed.

In reality, the post office was founded during the American Revolution as a public service, not as a revenue-generating enterprise, in order to provide the entire country with affordable, reliable access to mail, newspapers and information needed to participate in a democratic society. This principle is now under attack.

USPS management is adding to the dangers faced by postal workers through deep cuts to safety, including under the hated “Delivering for America” restructuring to consolidate its network along Amazon lines.

The deadly consequences of subordinating safety to cost-cutting have already been exposed at one of the program’s flagship facilities in Palmetto, Georgia, where four workers have died in two years. Each of these deaths was abetted by nonexistent safety plans, no safety protocols, no on-site medical professionals, no defibrillators or readily available lifesaving equipment, no reliable cell phone coverage and repeated delays and confusion in directing first responders through the massive site.

The implications of Steiner’s framework will have dire consequences for rural carriers. Rural carriers are, in occupational safety terms, lone workers: employees who work by themselves without close or direct supervision. Some countries, like Australia, have responded to risks facing postal workers by replacing older vehicles with electric delivery vehicles equipped with multi-directional cameras, telematics/GPS and panic buttons to alert supervisors or emergency responders when a worker is in danger.

But the only systematic tracking apparatus rural carriers carry is designed to cut pay, not protect their lives. Under the Rural Route Evaluated Compensation System (RRECS), developed jointly by USPS and the NRLCA (National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association), scanners record a carrier’s every movement for the purpose of route evaluation and pay. This was used to massively downgrade the value of workers’ routes, leading to pay cuts for up to two-third of all carriers, in many cases by \$10,000 a year or more.

Nearly half of rural routes rely on workers’ private vehicles. A 2022 USPS Office of Inspector General report found that more than 36,900 of over 79,500 rural routes were serviced by vehicles not designed for mail delivery.

Cluster box unit (CBU) location poses another risk: USPS promotes centralized delivery for efficiency, but guidance to builders does not require lighting, awnings or dedicated carrier parking, though such features “may be beneficial.”

The response of the union bureaucracy has been to present the wave of attacks on postal workers primarily as a law-and-order issue, not as a social and workplace safety crisis. The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) is promoting the Protect Our Letter Carriers Act, a bipartisan legislation backed by

Democrats and Republicans, as its central answer to assaults and robberies.

The bill would require the appointment of an assistant US attorney in every judicial district to prioritize postal crimes and would direct the U.S. Sentencing Commission to impose harsher sentencing guidelines, treating assaults and robberies against postal workers in the same manner as assaults on federal law enforcement officers.

The NALC presents this as a strategy to “deter” crime. National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association President Don Maston has endorsed the same framework, declaring that criminals are putting “the health and safety of our dedicated rural letter carriers in harm’s way.”

The bureaucracy accepts the social devastation that produces crime, accepts the USPS restructuring that places workers in danger, and then appeals to Congress and federal prosecutors after workers have already been assaulted, robbed or killed. The same Congress being asked to “protect” letter carriers is overseeing the destruction of the postal service as a public institution, while management uses the language of financial crisis to prepare deeper cuts to rural service.

The death of Brandi Byrd Reynolds exposes the need for an entirely different response. Postal workers cannot rely on management, Congress, regulators or the union apparatus to protect them. The defense of postal workers’ lives requires rank-and-file committees in every station, installation and route office, controlled by workers themselves, to fight for safe staffing, safe routes, reliable emergency communications, properly maintained postal vehicles, safe CBU placement, full transparency over injuries and deaths and the right to stop work under unsafe conditions.

Such a struggle must be connected to the defense of the post office itself as a public service, not a profit-making enterprise to be gutted along corporate lines. The safety of postal workers and the right of the population to universal mail service are inseparable from the fight against the social conditions—poverty, addiction, isolation, collapsing infrastructure and the destruction of public services—that are producing violence across the country.



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