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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0514

September 30, 2020

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Ms. Tammy L. Whitcomb
Inspector General
United States Postal Service
1735 N. Lynn St.
Arlington, VA 22200

Dear Inspector General Whitcomb:

We write to request the United States Postal Service (USPS) Office of the Inspector General investigate the rise in mail theft across the country and Postmaster General Louis DeJoy's decision to prevent USPS police officers from investigating mail theft that occurs away from post office property.¹

In light of stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements, more Americans than ever are relying on the Postal Service to stay safe, while still accessing critical supplies like medication and to stay in touch with friends and families. The overall rise in the use of the Postal Service for deliveries of essential goods, combined with economic relief efforts, including stimulus and unemployment checks, has been accompanied by a rise in mail theft.

In Daly City, California, a cluster box servicing 300 residents was recently broken into and two residents had their identity stolen after their mail was stolen. Unfortunately, this is not uncommon. Between April and May, a property management company in Oakland, California reported that there were five incidents of mail theft at their various properties, impacting more than 200 units and approximately 300 residents.² In Fremont, California, nineteen thefts were reported in the month of July, including one 300-unit apartment complex that was hit by mail theft twice in just three days.³ The same time last year, only six incidents of mail theft were reported.⁴ In Kirkland, Washington, local police put out an alert to residents in April after an increase in mail theft, reminding residents to check their mail regularly and report suspicious

¹ Kyle Cheney, *Postal Union Sues USPS, DeJoy Over Limits to Mail Theft Enforcement Authority*, POLITICO (Sept. 14, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/14/postal-service-police-union-sues-dejoy-414537>.

² Melanie Woodrow, *Thieves Targeting Tax Refunds, Stimulus and Unemployment Checks Caught on Camera*, ABC7 NEWS (May 5, 2020), <https://abc7news.com/mail-theft-usps-irs-stimulus-checks-tax-refund/6154546/>.

³ Julian Glover, *Mail Theft on the Rise in Fremont with 19 Incidents in July So Far*, ABC7 NEWS, <https://abc7news.com/mail-theft-fremont-online-shopping-box-broken-into-police/6331185>.

⁴ *Id.*

activity.⁵ Letter carriers in Chicago, Illinois reported worrying about their safety, particularly those who carry keys for cluster boxes in apartment complexes and neighborhoods.⁶

Even the USPS blue collection boxes are not safe from the rise in theft. Nearly \$200,000 in checks were stolen from a box outside a New Orleans post office in February.⁷ In Peachtree City, Georgia, police warned residents to stop dropping their mail at the main collection box after repeated theft.⁸

Despite the increase in theft, on August 25, 2020, the Postal Service directed its police officers to end all mail-protection and other law enforcement activities occurring off of Postal Service real estate.⁹ According to a complaint filed by the Postal Police Officers Association, Postal Service police officers may no longer assist in preventing and investigating mail theft, mail tampering, and crimes against postal employees.¹⁰ The change in policy was particularly abrupt given, in January 2020, the USPS began to train and instruct Postal Service police officers on investigating and enforcing mail-theft laws away from postal facilities.¹¹ Further, prior to this training, in 2016, the head of Postal Police operations testified in federal court that Postal Service police officers were frequently used as “mobile agents in the street” to protect letter carriers and investigate crimes like mail fishing.¹² It is unclear whether this nationwide change was vetted by the Postal Regulatory Commission in advance of its implementation.

The timing of this announcement came just one day after Postmaster General DeJoy testified to Congress that he would delay policy changes that could impact timely mail delivery ahead of the 2020 Election.¹³ The decision also came less than a week after Postal Service police arrested President Trump’s former chief strategist, Steve Bannon, on fraud allegations.

As you continue to investigate recent changes implemented under Postmaster General DeJoy’s tenure, we ask that you also examine:

1. What specific changes were put in place by Postmaster General DeJoy that impact USPS police officers?

⁵ Kaila Lafferty, *Western Washington Sees Rise in Mail Theft During Coronavirus Pandemic*, KING5 (Apr. 30, 2020), <https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/mail-theft-on-the-rise-during-coronavirus-pandemic-bellevue-kirkland/281-214499ab-616d-48d9-bfd9-46299f79996c>.

⁶ Marissa Parra, *Postal Workers Worried About Safety as Mail Thefts are on the Rise*, CBS CHICAGO (Dec. 31, 2019), <https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2019/12/31/postal-workers-worried-about-safety-as-mail-thefts-are-on-the-rise/>.

⁷ Rich Schapiro, *Thieves are Stealing Checks from USPS Boxes. Is It ‘Mailbox Fishing’ or an Inside Job?*, NBC News (Aug. 22, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/thieves-are-stealing-checks-usps-boxes-it-mailbox-fishing-or-n1237320>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Complaint for Injunctive Relief at para. 1, *Postal Police Officers Ass’n v. U.S.P.S., et al.*, Case No. 20-cv-2566 (2020).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.* at para. 7.

¹² *Id.* at para 30.

¹³ Cheney, *supra* note 1.

2. What was the rationale for these changes? What analyses of their impact did Postmaster General DeJoy or other Postal Service officials conduct before putting these changes in place?
3. Did Postmaster General DeJoy or other Postal Service officials consult with the Trump Administration, including, but not limited to, the U.S. Department of the Treasury, before these policy changes were implemented?
4. Did the USPS submit the proposed changes for an advisory opinion from the Postal Service Regulatory Commission, and was this required before implementing the changes?
5. How will the changes implemented by Postmaster General DeJoy impact the safety of letter carriers?
6. Will the changes implemented by Postmaster General DeJoy prevent USPS police officers from investigating mail theft that occurs at cluster boxes or USPS blue collection boxes?
7. What actions, if any, has the Postal Service taken to address the increase in mail theft during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Thank you for your attention to these matters. Please contact Rachel Marshall (Rachel.Marshall@mail.house.gov) from my office with any questions.

Sincerely,



Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

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