



Leadership Council
of Aging Organizations

Max Richtman, Chair

September 22, 2020

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 69 members of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO), I write to implore you to take whatever steps necessary, be they administrative, legislative, or otherwise to support the United States Postal Service (USPS) and to sustain the role of the USPS as the first, best, and only source of universal delivery service to the 65 million older people we represent. These older adults depend on USPS daily to deliver essential communications and goods that are integral to their health, independence, and quality of life.

We believe that recent administrative actions have unnecessarily delayed and diverted the mail, including the delivery of lifesaving medications.¹ The current COVID-19 public health emergency has a disproportionately harmful impact on older adults and necessitates minimizing contact with other people. For older adults, especially those with preexisting conditions, who are quarantining for safety, a trip to the pharmacy, grocery store, or polling site could unnecessarily expose them to greater risk of infection from COVID-19. Although the Postmaster General may be measuring service changes in terms of dollars saved, many Americans measure them as cuts in services and, potentially, lives lost.

USPS is called the “Postal Service” for a reason. The agency is not a business designed to make a profit, and cost-cutting efforts that undermine its universal service mission run counter to USPS’s purpose. For these reasons, we urge you to support legislation to ensure USPS reverses the recent operational changes and provides an adequate level of service to the American people. This includes the Delivering for America Act (H.R. 8015), passed by the House on August 22, that would prohibit and reverse the recent changes and ensure pre-pandemic service levels. LCAO also continues to urge Congress to pass emergency appropriations for USPS to ensure financial viability without decreased service. Such funds would additionally be provided by the bipartisan Postal Emergency Assistance Act (S. 4147) as introduced in the Senate and by provisions of the HEROES Act (H.R. 6800) as passed by the House, among other bills. We urge swift passage of adequate USPS funding by both chambers.

Millions of people rely on timely USPS delivery for their medications, and demand is increasing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, over 170 million prescriptions were filled by mail in the

¹ Durkee, A. (2020, August 14). Postmaster General Acknowledges ‘Unintended Consequences’ Of USPS Changes Causing Mail Delays. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisondurkee/2020/08/14/postmaster-general-louis-dejoy-acknowledges-unintended-consequences-of-usps-postal-service-changes-mail-delays/#392f21560525>

United States,² and during the course of the pandemic, there has been a 20 percent increase in prescription drugs filled through mail service pharmacies.³ At the same time, the cutbacks imposed by the Postmaster General have caused significant and increasing delays (ranging from 18 to 32 percent) in the delivery of mail order prescriptions. In general, this means that deliveries that typically would take 2 to 3 days are taking 3 to 4 days.⁴

Delays pose potentially serious health risks for those requiring prescription medication. As one pharmaceutical company reported to the Senate, “for the nearly half of adults in the United States with a chronic condition, timely delivery of prescription medication can have a direct impact on their health outcomes.”⁵ If the USPS experiences delays in delivering these prescriptions, the Medicare beneficiaries and other older people LCAO represents may have an insufficient supply of medication, thereby resulting in adverse clinical outcomes. More than ever before, people are relying on the USPS to deliver their lifesaving prescription medications and other necessities, enabling them to remain safely at home.

Further, the obstruction of the mail system in the midst of a pandemic threatens the rights of older adults, in particular, to exercise their constitutional right to vote in a fair and free election from the safety of their own homes.

Additionally, a robust USPS is critical to protecting the economic security of America’s older adults as many rely on the mail for receipt of critical financial communication including receipt of Social Security benefits. Nearly 850,000 checks are mailed monthly to retirees, those on disability and those receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Overall, Social Security sends 350 million and receives millions more pieces of mail every year including replacement Social Security cards and Medicare enrollment forms.⁶

Many of the 60 million Medicare beneficiaries with limited internet access also rely on mailings from CMS and others regarding their coverage, changes in benefits, and particularly as open enrollment approaches, educational resources to make informed decisions about coverage. The USPS has proven to be a lifeline for older Americans, especially those in rural and Indigenous

² Kaiser Family Foundation. (2020). Number of Mail Order Prescription Drugs Per Capita, 2019. State Health Facts. <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/state-indicator/number-of-mail-order-prescription-drugs-per-capita/>

³ Hopkins, J.S. (2020, May 12). Mail-Order Drug Delivery Rises During Coronavirus Lockdowns. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mail-order-drug-delivery-rises-during-coronavirus-lockdowns-11589281203>

⁴ *Rapidly Increasing Postal Service Delivery Delays for Mail-Order Prescription Drugs Pose Health Risks for Millions of Americans*. Staff Report prepared for U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bob Casey. (September 2020). www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Warren_percent20Casey_percent20Mail_percent20Order_percent20Drug_percent20Staff_percent20Report_percent20Final.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Miller, M. (2020, August 27). Is Social Security Becoming a Pawn in the Postal Service Crisis? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/27/business/post-office-social-security-checks-mail.html>

communities.⁷ Many Americans, especially those without internet access, have also long relied on USPS to deliver vital information about their health and finances. The Federal Communications Commission estimates that 14.5 million people in rural areas lack access to broadband.⁸ In fact, 18 percent of Americans still pay their bills by mail, according to an ACI Worldwide report.⁹ According to the Pew Research Center, a third of adults age 65 and older report they never use the internet and almost half lack home broadband. The digital divide is even greater for older adults of color.¹⁰ For example, Pew has found that 55 percent of Black older adults do not go online and 70 percent do not have broadband at home.¹¹ Simply put, throughout this crisis, USPS has demonstrated its vital role in American society: enabling people of all ages to stay home, stay informed, and stay safe.

Postal workers provide an essential service to everyone in the country, no matter how rich or poor we are or where we live. During this pandemic, postal workers have continued to keep communities connected. For generations, letter carriers from inner-city neighborhoods to rural farms have been steadfast and a major remedy for social isolation.

In these stressful times, as Congress commits resources to relief efforts for individuals, families, and businesses large and small, the federal government should similarly optimize the functioning of the USPS to preserve our democracy and protect the health and well-being of all Americans.

LCAO urges you to act expeditiously before recessing for the November 3 election to deploy whatever resources necessary — be they administrative, legislative, or other — to sustain the integrity of USPS operations in this important and challenging year. Americans of all ages, particularly older people, are depending on you.

Sincerely,

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

Chair

⁷ Kim, C. (2020, April 16). If the US Postal Service fails, rural America will suffer the most: The USPS is “a lifeline” for many remote and Native communities. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/16/21219067/us-postal-service-shutting-down-rural-america-native-communities>

⁸ Federal Communications Commission. *Eighth Broadband Progress Report*. <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/eighth-broadband-progress-report>

⁹ ACI Worldwide. *Americans Pay More than Half of Their Bills Online*. Press statement. (2017, January 24)

¹⁰ Anderson, M & Perrin, A. (2017, May 17). Tech Adoption Climbs Among Older Adults. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/05/17/tech-adoption-climbs-among-older-adults/>

¹¹ Smith, A. (2014, January 6). African Americans and Technology Use: A Demographic Portrait. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/01/06/african-americans-and-technology-use/>