

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement of Chairman Gerald E. Connolly **Hearing on “Delivering for Pennsylvania: Examining Postal Service Delivery and Operations from the Cradle of Liberty”** **September 7, 2022**

Last October, we held a hearing in Chicago to investigate its deteriorating mail delivery performance. In February, we visited Baltimore – the city with the worst on-time delivery rating in the nation. Today marks our third hearing examining Postal delivery in just the last 10 months.

Philadelphia, the host of our third hearing, is the birthplace of our Constitution and the hometown of the nation’s first Postmaster General: Benjamin Franklin. This city is a fitting location to examine the Postal Service, which has transformed since its operations began even before the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

In 1753, Benjamin Franklin assumed the role of Deputy Postmaster General of the Colonies, helming a money-making mailing venue for Britain that catered exclusively to lawyers and businessmen. Then the Postal Service was too expensive for most to access – until Mr. Franklin took steps to democratize the service.

Once he became Postmaster General, Franklin streamlined postal routes, improved accounting practices, and, most importantly, Franklin made the Postal Service more equitable—lowering prices and expanding services to attract a universal customer base that ensured the Postal Service was not a darling of the rich.

It is with these egalitarian and foundational ideals in mind that we hold this hearing in the Cradle of our nation’s Liberty. We are here to ensure that the Postal Service bonds this nation into a union.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our Postal Service workforce delivered prescription medications, paychecks, food stuffs, stimulus checks, holiday and gifts, rapid COVID tests from the Biden Administration, and more to homes and businesses across the country.

A June 2020 Harris Poll found that the Postal Service ranked as the “single most essential company to Americans during the pandemic,” outranking companies that manufacture PPE and sanitizers. According to Pew Research, 91% of Americans have a favorable view of the Postal Service—making it the most popular federal agency.

The Postal Service employs 630,000 individuals who live in every single congressional district. That workforce delivers mail to more than 163 million delivery points each day and operates more than 31,000 post offices nationwide.

In April, Congress enacted the Postal Service Reform Act, which I co-sponsored. This once-in-a-generation legislation puts the Postal Service on the path of financial solvency—unshackling it from unfair statutory burdens that kept it mired in unnecessary payments and debt. The bill plants the Postal Service on firm financial ground, readying it for the future.

Congress must make sure Postal Service leadership is prepared and poised to take the reins we hand them. Recent reports and constituent voices leave us concerned that they are not.

A recent inspector general report found the Postal Service has not been meeting the needs of its customers. In fact, the Postal Service Office of Inspector General found that the Postal Service only met service performance targets for three of 33 products in Fiscal Year 2020.

Good, reliable service is vital to the Postal Service's long-term survival. Late or lost deliveries may drive mailers away from using the Postal Service.

Fortunately, nationwide service performance significantly improved since 2020—consistently meeting on-time delivery target rates in most regions. We should certainly recognize this progress. But I should also note that the Postal Service reduced its on-time delivery targets, particularly for First-Class Mail. So, some of the improvement we see is likely attributable to these new decreased service standards—and not to improvements in the speed of mail delivery.

Today we are in Philadelphia—the City of Brotherly Love—to look at on-time mail delivery and more.

First, we want to highlight the Postal Service's recent announcement that it will consolidate functions in more than 200 post offices and postal facilities around the country—including several in Pennsylvania. In addition, the Postal Service previously announced that it intends to cut up to 50,000 positions to reach a “break even” point as part of Mr. DeJoy's 10-year plan.

Chief among Congress's concerns is that the Postal Service has once again failed to keep its key stakeholders—its workforce and Congress—effectively informed of their plans and how it will impact careers and everyday job performance. We also remain inherently skeptical of a long-term Postal Service plan that relies on rate hikes, slower service, fewer workers, and a reduced infrastructure. Ben Franklin, who invested in more services for more people, would be aghast.

We also have a keen interest in ensuring that the Postal Service is prepared to serve as a lynchpin of the voting franchise. During the 2020 election period, the Postal Service delivered roughly 543 million pieces of election mail—including 135 million ballots to and from voters, a 96% increase from 2016. In 2022, the Postal Service has already helped deliver ballots for 42 primaries, runoffs, and special elections. Compared to the same period during the 2018 midterm elections, election mail volume has increased 200%.

Pennsylvania is a key crossroads for American democracy. We must ensure that everyone has unfettered access to vote using the method that works for them. Many states have deadlines for requesting and returning election ballots that make it difficult or potentially impossible for the Postal Service to deliver them to election officials in time to qualify as a valid vote. In other states, like Pennsylvania, conservative legislators have sought to place restrictions on mail-in voting, citing unfounded election fraud claims.

Vote-by-mail is safe and effective—so safe and effective that both former President Trump and the current Postmaster General vote-by-mail. Today we seek to ask questions that ensure the Postal Service is ready for its consequential role in November's mid-term elections.

Next, mail theft and mail-related crime have skyrocketed in Pennsylvania and across the nation.

Between 2018 and 2021, robberies of mail carriers more than tripled, and robberies involving a gun more than quadrupled, according to Postal Service data. The Postal Inspection Service is opening cases in only a fraction of these crimes—offering little in the way of crime prevention.

The Philadelphia Inquirer called Pennsylvania a “hot spot for check theft,” with 871 stolen checks found on the “dark web” in May 2022 alone. Meanwhile, the Postal Police force has shrunk to 455 officers—down 65%—from 1,341 officers in 2002. And the Postal Service has determined that these officers should be confined exclusively to

Postal Service property – all but inviting would-be thieves to attack Postal workers while they are on their delivery routes.

We need more Postal Police who are vested with the authorities needed to prevent crime and stop them where they happen.

Finally, we need to make certain—as Postmaster General Benjamin Franklin did, that the Postal Service is accessible to everyone. We must ensure that rate hikes do not return the Postal Service to a service of the privileged. That is why, on Friday I plan to introduce the Ensuring Accurate Postal Rates Act, which would require the Postal Regulatory Commission, which has oversight authority over the Postal Service’s rate determinations, to restart their rate making system review process and include the positive financial effects of the Postal Service Reform Act to determine if existing enhanced rate increase authorities are warranted.

We have a full agenda of policy issues for today’s hearing. To start, we will hear testimonials from two constituents of our Members in attendance today to help focus our attention on issues of access to postal facilities and care and justice for those who risk their lives delivering mail every day. I look forward to hearing from these constituents, our witnesses, Members of the Pennsylvania delegation—and to ensuring that Pennsylvanians are getting the mail delivery services they need and deserve.

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Contact: Nelly Decker, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181