

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 3, 2020

Mr. Louis DeJoy
Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Room 4012
Washington, D.C. 20260

Dear Mr. DeJoy,

We are extremely concerned about operational changes that have been implemented by the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the harmful consequences including mail delays that have affected our residents and businesses. While you recently stated that some changes will be temporarily halted, we remain troubled by your refusal to reverse prior changes and the ongoing impacts to delivery services. We are especially alarmed that proposed additional changes may increase mail delivery costs for Hawaii in particular. We request that you eliminate the service delays, reverse previous changes that have contributed to these delays, and suspend implementation of further changes to USPS operations until we no longer have a nationally declared public health emergency due to COVID-19.

Like other states and communities around the country, residents throughout Hawaii have voiced complaints about recent mail service delays and how their lives are being adversely impacted. A common problem has been prescription refills failing to arrive on time, forcing people to scramble for emergency supplies of prescription medication. At least one health care provider in Hawaii processes mail order prescriptions in the continental U.S. and starting in July, patients were experiencing delays of up to two weeks. These service delays have the potential of affecting the 120,000 veterans in Hawaii, especially the 50,000 who receive their medication through the mail from the Veteran's Health Administration. Hawaii's small business owners, who have already been impacted by COVID-19 are now having to work around delayed supplies or deal with late deliveries to customers. We have also heard from several constituents who were not able to cast their ballot and vote in Hawaii's primary election on August 8, 2020, as some ballots took weeks to reach the voter or did not arrive at all.

The examples we share are just some of the delivery service issues Hawaii residents have experienced as result of the changes that have occurred in recent weeks. Until recently, the USPS had maintained a consistent and steady flow of necessary and vital items to the islands. As an island state, we cannot drive to another island to get supplies and the air travel time to the nearest state in the continental U.S. is approximately five hours. The lives and livelihoods of individuals living in Hawaii depend on prompt, reliable deliveries of medication, food, and other goods by mail.

We understand that you have agreed to temporarily suspend some of the operational changes recently implemented. However, we remain concerned that delays will continue, not only affecting present deliveries, but also the delivery of ballots for the general election, which is just two months away. Hawaii is now a universal vote-by-mail state, where a ballot is mailed to every registered voter before the election. It is critical that you not just commit to delivering election mail “fully and on time,” but that you develop a plan and take actions to show your commitment to treating election mail as first-class mail, postmarking ballots with prepaid postage, and having extra resources ready to deploy to ensure voters are able to exercise their right to vote.

We are also concerned with possible impacts on services to non-contiguous states and territories, like Hawaii, once these operational changes resume after the election. In your testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, you confirmed that further changes at USPS are being considered, including price increases for Hawaii, Alaska and the U.S. territories. After the general election is concluded, this country will still be in the middle of a pandemic that has so far killed more than 184,000 people in the United States, and according to your testimony, the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. has had “broad reaching impacts on all aspects of [USPS] operations.” Over the last six months, this crisis has resulted in postal employee shortages, particularly in areas experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases, and reduced flights, which you noted has limited the supply of commercial air trips available to carry USPS mail. These problems could continue for the duration of the pandemic and challenge USPS operations for the foreseeable future.

During the House Committee on Oversight and Reform hearing on August 24, 2020, you stated your belief that the transportation changes you instituted should have sped up the delivery of mail. You were wrong. Communities across the country are facing widespread delays in mail delivery services and unnecessary hardship for many people at a time when this nation can least afford it. Moreover, it has taken far longer than expected to reverse the resulting delays. Given the challenges our nation and the USPS are already experiencing from the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot afford any more short-sighted, unintended, and completely avoidable disruptions to American lives and livelihoods. As representatives of a state particularly dependent on timely and reliable mail deliveries, we urge you to suspend any further operational changes for the duration of the nationally declared public health emergency due to COVID-19.

In addition, we ask that you provide our offices with answers to the following questions by September 14.

1. What actions have you taken and plan to take to ensure that election mail will be delivered “fully and on time” including details of how USPS will ensure that election mail will be treated as first-class mail, ballots with prepaid postage will be timely stamped with a postmark, and extra resources will be ready to deploy to ensure voters are able to exercise their right to vote? Please provide a copy of any plans or memos addressing these issues.
2. What proposals are being considered that would specifically impact prices or delivery of U.S. postal mail to the State of Hawaii? Will you commit to providing information

outlining the details of and reasons for such changes to us before they are submitted to the Board of Governors of the USPS and the Postal Regulatory Commission for approval?

3. What was the rationale for creating the Expedited to Street/Afternoon Sortation initiative that started on July 25, 2020? Have any Post Offices in the State of Hawaii been required to participate? If so, which Post Offices were selected? Will any Post Offices in Hawaii be asked to participate in the future? Will the USPS suspend the initiative until after the COVID-19 pandemic? If not, how much longer does the USPS intend to run the pilot program?
4. To what extent has the shortage of commercial flights impacted mail delivery nationally and in Hawaii? What steps are being taken to compensate for the reduction in carriage capacity?
5. How many mail sorting machines have been removed or taken offline in the State of Hawaii since July 1, 2020? To date, how many have been removed or taken offline in Hawaii in all of 2020? How many additional mail sorting machines are planned for removal or are expected to be taken offline in Hawaii in the remainder of this year? How many have been removed in Hawaii in each of the last five years?
6. How many collection boxes have been removed from service in the State of Hawaii since July 1, 2020? To date, how many collection boxes have been removed from service in Hawaii in all of 2020? How many additional collection boxes are planned for removal or are expected to be taken offline in Hawaii in the remainder of this year? How many have been removed in Hawaii in each of the last five years?

Sincerely,



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



TULSI GABBARD
Member of Congress



ED CASE
Member of Congress