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Interim Report on Threat of Postmaster General DeJoy's Postal Service Delays

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United States Senate Committee on

Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs

U.S. Senator Gary Peters | Ranking Member

Interim Report on Threat of Postmaster General DeJoy's Postal Service Delays

A HSGAC Minority Staff Report

INVESTIGATION UPDATE

August 21, 2020

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Senator Gary Peters, Ranking Member

BACKGROUND

On August 6, 2020, U.S. Senator Gary Peters, Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, launched an investigation into Postal Service delays resulting from operational changes at the United States Postal Service (USPS) made by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy. This interim report provides an update on Senator Peters' ongoing investigation and related responses by the Postmaster General.

In July, Senator Peters sought answers from newly installed Postmaster General DeJoy, following reports that Postmaster General DeJoy had directed widespread changes to Postal Service operations that many postal workers, experts, and others feared would cause significant delays and disrupt service for the millions of Americans who rely on the mail every day. These changes included the elimination of extra mail transportation trips, the reduction of overtime, the start of a pilot program for mail sorting and delivery policies at hundreds of post offices, and the reduction of equipment at mail processing plants. As Senator Peters wrote to Postmaster General DeJoy in July, these changes have slowed mail delivery and compromised service for veterans, small businesses, rural communities, seniors, and millions of Americans who rely on the mail for medicines, essential goods, voting, correspondence, and for their livelihoods.¹

INVESTIGATION OVERVIEW

Postmaster General DeJoy initially refused to acknowledge that he had ordered nationwide changes and that those changes were delaying mail and exacerbating challenges caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.² While he has since admitted to ordering changes that are causing delays, the Postal Service has failed to be transparent about the magnitude of the service problems and the impact being felt across the country.³

When the Postmaster General failed to provide straightforward answers to questions about the July changes and their impacts on delivery, Senator Peters invited members of the public, Postal Service employees, and others to share information directly. Since inviting the public to respond, Senator Peters has received over 7,500 messages from individuals sharing their recent experiences with the Postal Service.

¹ U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Gary Peters Letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy (July 17, 2020), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/200717_Letter_USPSServiceChanges.pdf; Senators Peters, Schumer, Carper, and Klobuchar Letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy (July 31, 2020), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/200730_LettertoPMGDeJoy.pdf.

² Thomas J. Marshal, USPS General Counsel and Executive V.P., Letter to Senator Gary Peters, (July 22, 2020), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20200722_USPS%20Response%20to%20Peters%20Jul%2017%20Ltr.pdf.

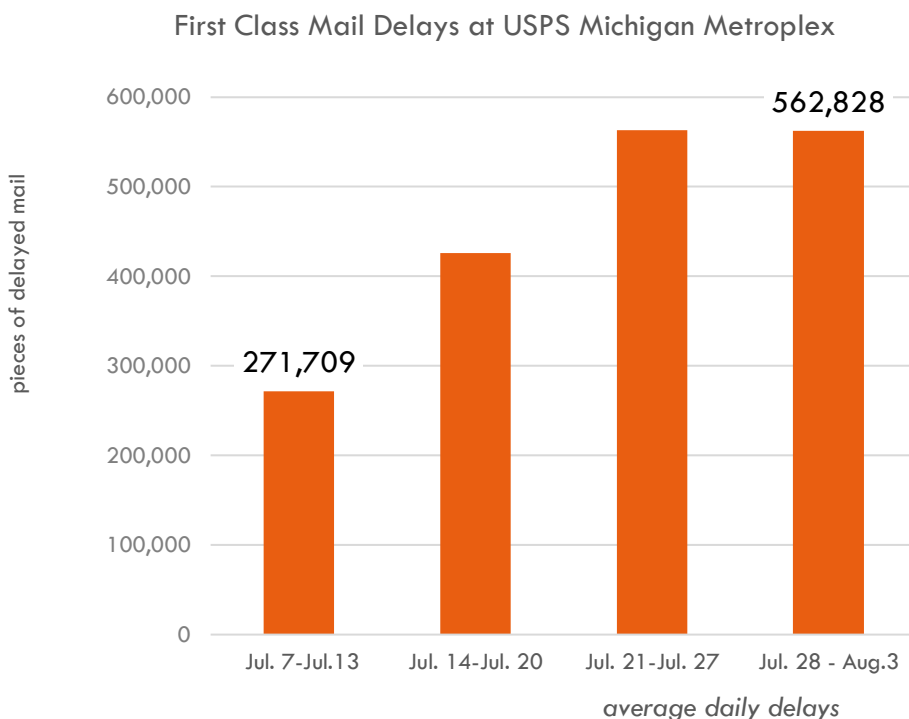
³ David E. Williams, USPS Chief Operating Officer and Executive V.P., Letter to Senators Peters, Schumer, Carper, and Klobuchar (August 6, 2020), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/20200806_USPS%20Response%20to%20Peters%20et%20al%20Jul%2030%20Ltr.pdf.

ONGOING OVERSIGHT

On August 18, 2020, after first speaking with and formally requesting that Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Ron Johnson hold a hearing on these concerns, Ranking Member Peters secured a Senate oversight hearing with Postmaster General DeJoy to be held on August 21, 2020.⁴ Just hours after this hearing was announced, Postmaster General DeJoy reversed course on some, but not all, of the operational changes he initially ordered.⁵

Questions remain about Postmaster General DeJoy’s actions as reports continue to surface identifying continued removal of mail sorting machines and alarming postal delivery delays.⁶ In addition, internal USPS reports obtained during the investigation show sharp increases in mail delays following Postmaster General DeJoy’s July directives implementing operational changes to mail delivery. In particular, the U.S. Postal Service Michigan Metroplex – one of the largest mail processing facilities in the country – has experienced significant delays.⁷

Figure 1. First Class Mail Delays at USPS Michigan Metroplex



⁴ U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Ranking Member Gary Peters Letter to Chairman Ron Johnson, (Aug. 16, 2020), https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/200816_Letter_HearingRequestUSPS.pdf.

⁵ Postmaster General DeJoy says he will stop postal service changes until after November election, USA Today (August 18, 2020), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/08/18/election-usps-postmaster-general-says-hes-suspending-mail-changes/5602523002/>.

⁶ Mail sorting machines taken apart in Grand Rapids, Detroit Free Press (August 19, 2020), <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/08/19/mail-sorting-machines-grand-rapids-voter-suppression/5611007002/>.

⁷ Daily Reports for Pontiac Metroplex (July 7, 2020 – August 6, 2020). On file with Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

As shown in Figure 1 above, the volume of delayed mail more than doubled in the month since Postmaster General DeJoy's new directives. During the week of July 7, 2020, there were an average of 271,709 pieces of delayed first-class mail sitting at the Pontiac Metroplex each day. For the week of July 28, 2020, that number jumped to 562,828. Individual daily mail delay totals reached unprecedented highs, for example, with over 860,000 pieces of delayed mail at the Metroplex by August 3, 2020.⁸

Senator Peters personally toured the Metroplex on August 10, 2020. During his visit, Senator Peters questioned the cause of the delays and raised concerns about the Postmaster General's directives.⁹

IMPACT OF DELAYS

The below stories, provided with permission from among the over 7,500 messages individuals have shared with Senator Peters, illustrate the harm Postmaster General DeJoy's changes have caused for veterans, seniors, small businesses, and countless citizens across the country.

A. Families and loved ones are being harmed by delays caused by these changes.

Millions of Americans rely on the Postal Service to deliver essential prescription medications every day. Since opening his investigation, Senator Peters has received over 500 messages about concerns related to delivery of medication.

- **Mary (Redford, MI)** – According to Mary, her daughter has consistently received her medication through the mail in 3-4 days. On July 20, 2020, Mary was notified that her daughter's medication had been sent, but it took nine days to be delivered. While waiting for the medication, she spoke to a postal worker about getting her daughter's medication who said that "stuff was everywhere" and that they had "never seen it like this" so they would probably not be able to find it. When her daughter realized her medication wasn't coming on time, she tried to stretch what she had by taking one instead of two pills, and because of this had seizures and was transported to the hospital.
- **Laurinda (Sterling Heights, MI)** – Laurinda reported that she is immunocompromised and has been quarantined since Mid-March. Laurinda noticed delays in mail delivery about a month ago, but believes things have gotten worse. She now gets mail only every 2 or 3 days. Her medication was delayed and she went 4 days without it. Laurinda said she would have tried to get her prescriptions early if she knew about the delays, but her insurance does not allow that.

B. Veterans, seniors, and others are not receiving critical medication on time.

Our nation's veterans are at particular risk, given the VA's practice of using the postal service to deliver most essential prescription medications for veterans. Senator Peters has received over 3,000 messages from seniors, and over 600 messages from veterans as part of his investigation.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See, Peters, Lawrence Visit USPS Metroplex in Pontiac, Highlight Impact of Postal Service Delays on Michiganders, (Aug. 10, 2020), <https://www.peters.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/peters-lawrence-visit-usps-metroplex-in-pontiac-highlight-impact-of-postal-service-delays-on-michiganders>.

- **William (Laurens, SC)** – William is a disabled veteran who served in the Air Force. He is also a retired postal worker of 27 years as a Clerk in Greenwood County, SC. William reported that he is a diabetic and takes four shots a day. He has been receiving his prescriptions in the mail since 2003 and said this is the first time he has experienced delays. Usually, his prescriptions take about 3-5 days to arrive. In mid-July, William ordered his medication and it took almost 14 days to arrive. As a result, William had to travel to a clinic approximately an hour drive from his home for assistance related to his medication.
- **Kathleen (Harrison, MI)** – Kathleen is married to a retired teacher and they get their prescriptions through the mail. According to Kathleen, she ordered a refill in early July and did not receive her medication until early August. Usually this process takes 3-5 days. Kathleen ultimately had to pay for her prescription out-of-pocket because her insurance company would not pay for it twice in the same period.

C. Small businesses that rely on the Postal Service are struggling to survive.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already devastated small businesses across the country. Many have adapted by shifting to remote operations and offerings that make reliable shipping even more essential. Senator Peters has heard from over 700 small businesses across the country as part of this investigation.

- **Sue (Lake Orion, MI)** – Sue relies on the postal service to ship packages ordered through her online business. She estimates that 99% of the over 3,800 packages she shipped this year were through USPS. According to Sue, since the pandemic, sales have been down, but were still providing enough income for her to get by. Sue said that in recent weeks, however, customers have stopped purchases due to longer estimated delivery times and as a result, sales have dropped significantly. Sue has received an increasing number of messages from customers asking about delays and requesting refunds.
- **Beth (Ada, MI)** – Beth works for a company that produces educational materials for health care workers who work with dementia patients in hospitals and nursing homes. She said she started seeing problems with deliveries about two months ago as part of the pandemic. According to Beth, shipping costs have now almost doubled due to overnighting, and the company has had to lay off multiple people due to the combined impact of the pandemic and mail delay costs.
- **Cassandra (Grand Rapids, MI)** – Cassandra owns a pool business and in the last month has had issues getting payments to subcontractors and other local vendors. According to Cassandra, she only uses small businesses, so delays in payment could cause issues with payroll. She has also waited up to a month for a check to cover her payroll. Cassandra said she has had to turn down work because some parts won't be delivered in time for pool season in Michigan.

NEXT STEPS

Senator Peters has introduced legislation to block the Postmaster General from making any changes that would disrupt service for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency. He has also called on the U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors to immediately reverse changes made by Postmaster General DeJoy that degrade or delay mail delivery. Senator Peters will continue to investigate mail delays as well as the Postmaster General's actions, including whether he adheres to his announced cessation of operational changes.