

September 7, 2022

To: GrayRobinson
From: Ellen Lamb
Re: House Oversight Subcommittee hearing on USPS delivery issues

The House Oversight Subcommittee on Government Operations held a field hearing today on “[Delivering for Pennsylvania: Examining Postal Service Delivery and Operations from the Cradle of Liberty.](#)”

[Subcommittee Chair Gerry Connolly](#) (D-VA) called the hearing to order from the campus of Temple University, while other members participated via Zoom. He waived several visiting members onto the Subcommittee for the hearing: Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), Rep. Brendan Boyle (D-PA), Rep. Dwight Evans (D-PA), Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon (D-PA), Rep. Madeleine Dean (D-PA), Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA), Rep. Matt Cartwright (D-PA), and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)

He noted that the Subcommittee had previously held field hearings on mail delivery in Chicago and Baltimore. This is the third hearing on postal delivery in ten months.

Philadelphia is the hometown of the first US Postmaster General, Ben Franklin. Connolly said the colonial postal service had been too expensive for most people to use. Franklin democratized it, streamlined postal routes, improved accounting practices, and made service more equitable.

“We are here to ensure that the Postal Service bonds this nation into a union,” he said. The USPS was more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering prescription medications, paychecks and stimulus checks, food, holiday gifts, and rapid COVID tests. In June 2020, a Harris Poll found that the USPS ranked as the single most essential company during the pandemic.

The USPS employs 630,000 workers, distributed among every congressional district, and delivers mail to more than 163 million addresses nationwide. They operate more than 31,000 post offices.

In April 2022, Congress enacted the Postal Service Reform Act, which Connolly co-authored and co-sponsored. This law puts the USPS back on the path to financial solvency after years of statutory burdens that threatened to bankrupt it. USPS leadership must be prepared to take the reins Congress has given them, but recent reports suggest they are not.

Connolly cited a recent IG report that found the USPS met its service performance targets for only three of its 33 products in FY 2020. Reliable service is essential to the USPS’s survival. Performance has improved significantly since then, but the USPS reduced its on-time delivery targets, specifically for first-class mail. So some of that improvement comes from lowering the standards.

The USPS recently announced that it would consolidate functions of more than 200 post offices and other facilities around the country, including several in Pennsylvania. They’ve already said they plan to cut up to

50,000 jobs as part of the Postmaster General's ten-year plan. Once again, Connolly said, the USPS has failed to keep its workforce and Congress informed about these plans. Connolly said he was "inherently skeptical" about a plan for rate hikes, slower service, fewer workers, and reduced infrastructure.

It's also important to maintain the USPS's role in voting. During the 2020 election period, the USPS delivered about 543 million pieces of election mail, including 135 million ballots, a 96% increase from 2016. This year the USPS has already delivered ballots for 42 primaries, runoffs, and special elections, a 20% increase from 2018. Many states have deadlines for requesting and returning ballots that could make it difficult or even impossible to return ballots in time to be counted. Pennsylvania's conservative legislators are trying to impose restrictions on mail-in voting, with false claims about election fraud.

"Vote-by-mail is safe and effective," Connolly said. Both President Trump and PMG DeJoy vote by mail. Today's hearing will ask questions about the USPS's preparedness for this year's election.

Mail theft and mail-related crime have skyrocketed since 2018, Connolly continued. Robberies of mail carriers more than tripled, and crimes involving guns more than quadrupled. The Postal Inspection Service is not investigating many of these crimes or doing much to prevent crime. Pennsylvania has been hit especially hard by check theft. Connolly called for more Postal Police.

Finally, he said, they need to make sure that postal service remains accessible to everyone. The USPS can't become a service available only to the privileged. Connolly said he had introduced the Ensuring Accurate Postal Rates Act today, which would require the Postal Regulatory Commission to restart their rate-making system review process.

Today's hearing would begin with statements from two constituents of Committee members, Connolly said, about issues of access and care for those who risk their lives to deliver the mail.

He showed a video that introduced Susan Dennis, a resident of Chester and constituent of Rep. Scanlon. Ms. Dennis said that for the past seven years, she's been trying to get a wheelchair ramp for the Chester Post Office. She hasn't been able to find out why they don't have even a portable ramp. Nor do they have an automatic door opener.

Next on the video was Joe Dobbins, a USPS letter carrier from Chester County. He was assaulted in June, struck to the ground, fracturing a rib and straining his back. Although there's video evidence of this attack, the crime is not being tried in federal court. He had always thought that DOJ prosecuted attacks on postal workers.

Chair Connolly said that Ms. Dennis was a constituent of Rep. Scanlon's, and Mr. Dobbins was a constituent of Rep. Houlahan's.

Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), acting ranking member of the Subcommittee, welcomed his colleagues to Philadelphia and thanked the panelists. He said they all agreed on the importance of the USPS and their appreciation for the workers who had overcome so many challenges during the pandemic. The challenge was

not just to the USPS, but also to its customers. So much mail is time-sensitive, so on-time delivery is key to success. This was why they'd all been proud to support the Postal Reform Act. He particularly praised the repeal of the pension pre-funding mandate.

One purpose of these field hearings is to bring information back for legislation that will continue to improve workers' lives. Fitzpatrick is concerned about USPS recruitment and retention. If the USPS is broken, the ripple effect will touch everyone's lives.

Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) said that DC had seen an increase in mail theft, widespread delays, and undelivered mail. Public confidence has been shaken. Constituents have contacted her to report checks stolen and/or altered, with money stolen from customers' bank accounts. Norton thanked all the witnesses for appearing, but especially Frank Albergo, because he's been working with her office on the issue of mail theft.

Norton has introduced a bill to combat mail theft that would clarify the authority of US Postal Police officers to protect the mail, USPS property, and USPS employees.

Rep. Stephen Lynch (D-MA) said that Chair Connolly had done yeoman's work on the Postal Reform bill. He noted that standards for voting by mail vary from state to state. Massachusetts mail-in ballots have a bar code that automatically prioritizes them in the mail handling system, but this is not the case in every state. Some deadline systems have been passed in an apparent desire to make it harder to vote by mail. Lynch asked what they were doing to harmonize this system across all 50 states, and to prepare for any glitches in the 2022 elections.

Chair Connolly said the witnesses couldn't answer until they'd been sworn in, but he would make sure that question was answered.

Rep. Brendan Boyle (D-PA) welcomed the panel to his Congressional district, and thanked Committee staff and his staff for arranging the field hearing. He thanked Chair Connolly for scheduling this hearing, because he'd talked to Connolly about Philadelphia's mail delivery issues on the House floor.

Boyle said that he had four district offices in the region, and in 2019, those offices had fielded 60 complaints about postal service. That spiked to 199 in 2020, dropped to 147 in 2021, but so far this year they're on pace to exceed the 199 number. The conclusion is unavoidable: steps taken by PMG DeJoy and senior USPS staff have been inadequate to get service levels back where they need to be. Constituents have told him that postal service has never been worse in their lifetime. "Postmaster General DeJoy, you are no Ben Franklin." Boyle and other colleagues have called for DeJoy's termination in office.

Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) said he was honored to be part of today's hearing. He thanked Chair Connolly and the Committee for holding the hearing, and noted the difficult challenges the USPS had faced over the last several years. He thanked frontline USPS workers for persevering through the pandemic, but said they could not ignore reports of systemic problems. Constituents all across the state have been reporting problems with mail delivery, particularly in Luzern County, Montgomery County, and Dawson County. Philadelphia's Germantown

post office is an example of longstanding egregious problems. Delays and stolen mail have caused real economic hardship to those affected.

Casey said he understood the problems were hard to solve, but they need to make more progress. Pennsylvanians rely on the USPS for everything from paychecks to medical supplies. He looks forward to supporting the USPS as it seeks to improve its service.

Rep. Brenda Lawrence (D-MI), a career postal worker and supervisor, said that the USPS is the only company or federal agency that touches every single American home six days a week. Safe and speedy mail delivery is a necessity, which is why they must do all they can to keep postal workers safe as they do their jobs.

Lawrence said she'd spent 30 years as a member of the USPS family, and remembered the pride and sense of responsibility she'd felt. She always had tremendous faith in postal workers and inspectors. She thanked the OIG for their work in ensuring consistent mail delivery, and the Postal Police Service.

Rep. Matt Cartwright (D-PA) said that his office had been experiencing a record number of consistent complaints and requests for help with problems with mail and package delivery. Hundreds of constituents have responded to his survey about this with horror stories: first class mail going unsorted, major staff shortages. Some of his constituents have gone more than two consecutive days without mail. Some of his constituents have gone 10-12 days without mail. USPS locations have been closed without notice for as much as five days at a time. People rely on the mail for the essentials of their lives. They need to hold the USPS accountable, while answering the need for additional resources.

He thanked Gary Vaccarella for meeting with him and his staff, but said the issues are ongoing. Everyone wants the USPS to work.

Rep. Dwight Evans (D-PA) thanked the Chair and all of today's witnesses for the hearing. He's glad they're taking this seriously. His district has seen a sharp increase in lost and stolen mail over the last two years. His office has received hundreds of complaints, and when he and his staff have gone to the USPS with these complaints, the response has been unsatisfactory. The Post Office in Germantown has been particularly bad, and has failed to respond to his constituents' concerns. This is wrecking confidence in the USPS and the government more broadly.

Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon (D-PA) said she was especially happy to be having this hearing here today. She's concerned about the decline in USPS performance and worries that it will decline even further as a result of planned closures and consolidations. She's unhappy about the idea that DeJoy is trying to run the USPS as a business, and said that was contrary to its public mission.

Her office has received more complaints about postal service than about any other issue over the past few years. The Philadelphia region has one of the worst on-time service records in the country. Where delivery performance has improved, that's often only because they changed the performance standards. This was a particular concern during the 2016 Presidential election, and they want to make sure similar problems don't

recur this year. Staff shortages have caused post offices to close temporarily without notice. They've heard repeated stories of postal theft and other postal-related crimes, including more than one recipient of checks that were stolen and "washed" to be repurposed. This makes her even more surprised that PMG DeJoy is seeking to eliminate the Postal Police.

Finally, she said, she wanted to address longstanding problems at the Chester Post Office in Delaware County, in her district. That post office was built more than 80 years ago and has had no significant renovations. It has no accessibility ramps or lifts. This is not a small facility; it serves a city of more than 30,000 with a poverty rate above 30%. Scanlon has been asking the USPS to address this for more than a year. She's deeply concerned that they don't seem to have a plan.

Rep. Madeleine Dean (D-PA) thanked Chair Connolly for bringing the field hearing to Philadelphia. She expressed admiration for USPS workers, who showed themselves to be critically important during the COVID pandemic. Ben Franklin wanted the Postal Service to be egalitarian, serving everyone.

Her office has fielded three times as many postal complaints this year as they had for the entire span of 2021. Her constituents are worried about access to services. Speedy delivery of mail is critical in an election year. Dean wants to hear about what works and what doesn't, and wants to hold the USPS accountable.

Rep. Krissy Houlahan (D-PA) said that seniors in her district depend on the USPS for prescription drugs, and many students expect to be able to vote by mail. In Oxford, PA, the post office has been shut in the middle of the day because they don't have staff, and post offices elsewhere are falling apart. She wants answers on behalf of her community, and is glad to see Republican members at the hearing.

Pennsylvania deserves a well-functioning postal system, not just in election years.

Chair Connolly thanked Rep. Houlahan for mentioning bipartisanship, because the postal reform bill had passed with bipartisan support. Connolly thanked the witnesses for their patience. He asked the witnesses to take an oath before testimony began.

- **Gary Vaccarella**, DE-PA2 District Manager, US Postal Service
- **Melinda Perez**, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, US Postal Service Office of Inspector General
- **Ivan Butts**, President, National Association of Postal Supervisors
- **Frank Albergo**, National President, Postal Police Officers Association

Connolly noted that Vaccarella also had USPS subject matter experts available via Zoom to answer questions beyond his area of expertise: Peter Rendina, Deputy Chief Inspector of the Postal Inspection Service; Adrienne Marshall, USPS's director of election and government mail; and David Webster, senior director of processing operations for the USPS's Chesapeake Division.

Testimony

Mr. Vaccarella introduced himself and described his postal career, which began as a clerk in 1985.

He said that postal performance in his district, Pennsylvania 1, was consistently ranked among the strongest in the country, and had actually improved in some areas since before the pandemic. He acknowledged “some isolated incidents of past service disruptions,” due to “employee availability issues,” but said they’d taken proactive steps to address this. They’ve hired almost 6,000 new carrier assistants and postal support personnel, which he described as “pre-career” employees.

Vaccarella summarized national USPS statistics from the 2020 election cycle: unprecedented volume, ballots delivered to voters within an average of 2.1 days and returned to election officials in 1.6 days. In Pennsylvania, they’ve already been working with state and local election officials, and so far this year, average delivery time has been 1.79 days for mail from election officials and one day for mail from voters.

He said they shared community concerns about recent increases in thefts from collection boxes and robberies of letter carriers in Pennsylvania and other parts of the country. The US Postal Inspection Service is the law enforcement and security arm of the Postal Service, and are authorized to investigate and make arrests. They make thousands of arrests this year. They are working to improve collection box security with key and lock enhancements.

Vaccarella explained the difference between these Postal Inspectors and the uniformed Postal Police officers (PPOs). PPOs are assigned in areas where the USPS has identified a need for uniformed, trained, and armed officers. While it would increase security risks to remove those officers from USPS premises, the Postal Inspection Service has determined that allowing PPOs to patrol the streets wouldn’t speed up mail delivery or improve carrier safety. They’re not the investigators, and they shouldn’t be asked to do anything more than they’ve been doing.

Service performance throughout Pennsylvania has improved since the height of the pandemic, Vaccarella said. Service scores remain strong, and they are ready for the 2022 elections.

Ms. Perez said that Philadelphia’s postal delivery scores were close to national averages until autumn 2020, when they declined considerably. They’ve since rebounded to near the national averages, though problems may persist in certain locations.

Philadelphia was not the only region facing major service disruptions in the winter of 2020. The OIG looked at service performance in 17 districts and found similar problems in all of them: problems with employee availability, limited ability to move mail on commercial air networks, dock congestion leading to slower distribution among postal facilities.

Her office set up a new audit group, the Field Operations Review Team, to conduct targeted reviews. These audits include simultaneous visits to one mail processing plant and three or four post offices, so they get an understanding of where delays are occurring. They’ve conducted eight of these cluster visits in the western and central US this year, and they found issues relating to late and extra trips, scanning machine performance,

cluttered processing floors, and poor facility conditions. In 2023 this work will shift to the southern and eastern regions, including Philadelphia.

They have an open audit looking at the Postal Service's readiness for the 2022 midterm elections, and they are evaluating whether the USPS took the corrective actions the OIG recommended after the last election. They will make field visits across the country in the weeks up to and including Election Day, and they will provide the USPS with near-real time feedback.

Mail theft is an area of growing concern, Perez said. They recently began an audit to look at trends and evaluate the efforts the USPS and the Postal Inspection Service are making to prevent and respond to mail theft. The OIG has its own Office of Investigations that targets mail theft by postal employees; one of those investigations focused on stolen Treasury checks and gift cards in Philadelphia.

One factor in recent increases in mail theft is the challenge of "arrow key accountability," which the OIG reported in August 2020. Postal workers use these arrow keys to open collection boxes and delivery box units. Criminals are stealing arrow keys or buying them from postal employees. The OIG has instituted Operation Secure Arrow, a multifaceted effort to identify and investigate employees involved in the theft and misuse of these keys. They currently have 20 open investigations as part of this effort, which have already led to five criminal prosecutions and seven administrative actions.

Mr. Butts described the composition and activities of the National Association of Postal Supervisors (NAPS), who comprise approximately 40,000 USPS supervisors, managers, and postmasters.

He thanked Chair Connolly for his leadership on [HR 1623](#), the Postal Supervisors and Managers Fairness Act, and [HR 1624](#), the Postal Employee Appeal Rights Amendments Act. Those bills will provide fairness, pay consultation, and due process to executive and administrative scheduled postal employees. NAPS also supports [HR 1307](#), the Vote by Mail Tracking Act, which will require each state to use a standard envelope design with distinct bar codes that identify individual ballots.

NAPS is concerned about the USPS's recent announcement of plans to consolidate and realign mail processing operations around the country. This plan will consolidate 12 USPS associate offices in southeastern Pennsylvania into the Tri-County facility. Butts and his members want more information about why the USPS is doing this, what its goals are, and how it plans to measure the success of these changes. The Postal Accountability and Enforcement Act and the USPS handbook both require this disclosure.

Butts said that the USPS had considered a similar plan in 2014, but the Postal Inspector General cast serious doubts about its projected cost savings, and said the USPS had failed to provide rationales for specific consolidations. The IG made recommendations for improvement that the USPS dismissed.

NAPS has asked Congress to block the USPS's implementation of its consolidation plan pending a transparent and comprehensive analysis. Butts said Congressional oversight would be necessary to make sure these plans don't wind up increasing USPS expenses.

The security of the mail and the safety of postal personnel on property are at risk, Butts said. Two years ago, the Postal Inspection Service narrowed the authority of the Postal Police, restricting it only to crimes committed on

postal property. This change has exposed postal carriers and postal vehicles to crime. Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton has introduced [legislation](#) to clarify postal police authority to protect postal personnel and property outside the physical perimeter of postal real estate. NAPS supports this legislation.

Butts introduced retired PPO captain Butch Maynard and said that NAPS believed he'd been forced to retire in retaliation for his support of the postal police legislation. The Postal Inspection Service conducted a nationwide review of Postal Police division that ended in the closure of the PPF's Newark division, which Captain Maynard managed. He was the only employee of that office who wasn't placed elsewhere.

Mr. Albergo thanked Chair Connolly and the Committee for calling attention to the “dramatic rise in mail theft” and an equally disturbing increase in violent crimes against postal employees. Albergo described his role as National President of the Postal Police Officers Association (PPOA).

The Postal Police Force began in Philadelphia in 1970. Albergo described how PPOs serve a different function from postal inspectors — postal inspectors are more like plainclothes detectives, while PPOs are uniformed police. Postal inspectors show up after crimes are committed, but PPOs are positioned to keep crimes from happening. Their responsibilities used to include protecting letter carriers and the mail away from postal properties, but that changed in 2020.

Albergo said that the USPS had begun to “gut” the PPF during a pay dispute, three months before the November 2020 elections. The PPF has dropped in size from 2,700 officers at its peak to approximately 350. The PPF has been reduced by 20% since 2020.

Albergo provided details about the cuts to the PPF, which exceed anything required by budget constraints. Nationwide, PPOs are at only 62% of the number budgeted for. The Inspection Service eliminated entire contingents of PPOs in Detroit, Memphis, Oakland, San Francisco, St. Louis, Washington DC, and Philadelphia. The PPO attrition rate has far exceeded its hiring rate, and there's no plan to reverse that trend. Albergo said the USPS had paid Booz Allen Hamilton to “rubber stamp the absurd recommendation to elimination nearly all postal police divisions and positions.” Their cohort will drop under 300 by the end of 2024 without changes.

The Postal Inspection Service has almost four times as many postal inspectors as PPOs, but Albergo said this was backwards: it's better to prevent crime than to investigate it, and the PPOs do that. Local Postal Inspection Service managers have been asking for this, but the USPS has ignored their requests.

“Postal crime has spiraled out of control,” Albergo said. Postal workers are being attacked, mail is being stolen at unprecedented levels, and the Postal Inspection Service has done nothing to stop it. They need to realign their priorities.

Chair Connolly said it was “indeed an odd law enforcement strategy” to get rid of uniformed police just as personal violence and theft rates were skyrocketing.

He thanked George Kenney, representing Temple University, for hosting today's hearing. Mr. Kenney welcomed the Subcommittee on behalf of Temple University, and thanked them for supporting higher education.

Q&A

Rep. Eleanor Norton said that mail theft had become a big issue in the nation's capital. She asked Mr. Albergo about the USPS's recent notification to Postal Police that their authorities are restricted to USPS real property. She read from the statute, and said she didn't see that limit in the law; can't Postal Police protect postal workers, vehicles, etc.?

Mr. Albergo said they had believed they had this broader authority until the Postal Inspection Service issued a notice restricting its activities in the fall of 2020. It makes no sense to him.

Norton said they needed to fix this.

Albergo said that the presence of uniformed police will deter postal crime. "It's just a fact."

Norton said she'd heard that there weren't any Postal Police officers in the District of Columbia, and if this were true, she would need to address it.

Chair Connolly inserted several recent articles on the topic of mail theft into the record.

Rep. Fitzpatrick thanked Mr. Vaccarella for responding to a letter Fitzpatrick and his colleagues had sent him last month. He asked Vaccarella how the new postal reform law will help the USPS with employee recruitment and retention.

Vaccarella said the USPS recognized the need to focus on greater retention. They are giving employees more training opportunities and limiting work hours, especially for new employees.

Fitzpatrick said that his Problem Solvers Caucus had just endorsed the [Porch Pirates Act of 2022](#), which would make it a federal crime to steal mail off someone's porch. He asked Mr. Albergo what the greatest challenges facing PPOs were right now, and what Congress could do to improve postal security.

Albergo said that they need more officers, "right off the bat." They need to have their jurisdiction restored. The Inspection Service needs to understand that uniformed officers deter crime, and they should prioritize that instead of investigating crimes that have already occurred. It's much more cost effective to prevent crimes in the first place.

Fitzpatrick said that when he had been an FBI agent, it was always "a complete joy" to work with postal inspectors — "true professionals, always so cooperative."

Chair Connolly noted that that Congress had had more than 300,000 theft complaints from constituents over the past year, but that less than one half of one percent have been investigated. He wants to see numbers on prosecutions and ultimate convictions. "We're approaching a point where this is a cost-free crime," he said, because the chances of being pursued, convicted, and sentenced was "close to nil."

Rep. Lawrence said there were times, when she was working for the USPS, when she had to call on the Postal Police for protection. She asked Mr. Butts how the Postal Supervisors felt about the reduction of Postal Police authority.

Mr. Butts said the Postal Supervisors were 100% supportive of a strong Postal Police presence, including making routine patrols and providing escorts when needed.

Rep. Lawrence said that one of the tasks of the Postal Police when she was working was to provide security for employees as they entered and left the building, and that just having uniformed officers patrolling the area was a deterrent to crime. Also, the USPS employs a diverse workforce where sometimes situations need to be de-escalated. Lawrence said that she would be very concerned if, as a supervisor, she needed to call Postal Police to defuse a situation or protect an employee, but no officer was available. “This is a very, very important issue.”

Rep. Boyle said that he, Rep. Evans, and Rep. Scanlon had had press conferences and meetings in the fall of 2020 about the disruptions in mail service. He asked Ms. Perez to say more about this, and about what was happening at that time.

Ms. Perez said they’d found that mail delivery in Philadelphia dropped below the national average during that time, but the averages have improved since. She repeated that they’re planning a “cluster audit” for the Pennsylvania and Delaware regions in early 2023.

Boyle said that one reason performance numbers had improved was that Postmaster General DeJoy had changed delivery standards. Where first-class mail delivery used to take two to three days, the new standard is four to five days. His office is receiving more complaints about mail delivery now than they were during the height of the pandemic.

Ms. Perez said they were aware of an uptick in customer complaints, and this is not just happening in Philadelphia. She can’t discuss the specific root causes of those complaints, but repeated that they would be auditing the Pennsylvania and Delaware regions next year.

Boyle said he looked forward to getting updates about that. He asked Mr. Butts to talk about what postal supervisors are seeing that might not be reflected in statistics.

Butts said that Boyle had made a good point about service scores changing because the standards had changed, not because the service had improved. He noted that more than 600 pieces of processing equipment had been taken out of the system a few years ago, and that was bound to have an effect on performance. The USPS has a serious problem with employee retention, and they need to address that. They need to improve their onboarding process for new hires so that employees are actually prepared to do the tasks they’re asked to do.

Rep. Evans said his office had received countless complaints about checks being stolen, with the lowest-income constituents being hit hardest. Can the USPS provide data on how many people have been caught and charged in the Philadelphia region?

Ms. Perez said that their Office of Investigations focuses on mail theft, and they have more than 500 agents, of whom 40% are focused on mail theft. But she didn't have statistics on prosecutions. She said Mr. Vaccarella might.

Chair Connolly asked Rep. Evans to pause for a moment, and asked again: the OIG really doesn't know how many violations had been prosecuted in the Philadelphia area? He said he was not impressed with the overall statistics, and that it didn't appear that the Postal Inspection Service was aggressively pursuing anything.

Perez reminded Connolly that the OIG's investigators only look at crimes committed by postal workers. They work closely with the Postal Inspection Service to coordinate those activities.

Rep. Scanlon asked about consolidation of sorting and delivery centers. The post offices in her district are confused about this themselves, and have been asking her office to clarify what's going on. This consolidation seems to call for more vehicles, not fewer. Letter carriers will no longer pick up mail at their local facilities; they'll have to go to a consolidated facility. Won't this take more time and require more vehicles, especially for the carriers who currently have walking routes? How will this work with an already aging postal fleet?

Mr. Butts said that USPS leadership had just started briefing his members about this plan, but they already have a Tri-County facility in King of Prussia that has made this change. They merged five associate offices into this one facility. Carriers report to the Tri-County facility at the beginning of the day, rather than to their local station; they go back to their route and deliver their mail; and then they take outgoing mail back to King of Prussia. This means more carriers on the road in more vehicles. It's especially challenging when carriers get stuck in rush hour traffic.

They're also seeing that these new schedules mean that some carrier routes will have to be split, requiring additional people and additional vehicles. This is already happening in the mid-Hudson area, where they had nine walking routes that got consolidated into one of these remote facilities. They have seen a projection that these changes could cost \$2-3 billion, but the USPS hasn't given them that data.

Scanlon said she was concerned that these so-called "efficiencies" weren't efficiencies at all. She asked Ms. Perez whether the OIG had made any effort to audit unscheduled office closures — situations where people go to the Post Office and find a handwritten sign announcing that no one is there.

Perez said they hadn't looked at this, but they're still finalizing their audit plan for 2023, and that might be included.

Scanlon said she was concerned about this consolidation happening just as they're getting ready for the 2022 elections. "Once again, we have a slew of new changes" that could slow down mail-in ballots.

Chair Connolly thanked Rep. Scanlon for raising this issue, and said that unscheduled closures should be "so rare as to be exceptional." He asked whether the USPS had a policy about unscheduled closures.

Ms. Perez said she didn't know, off the top of her head, but one of the USPS representatives might.

Rep. Dean said that her questions would focus on her constituents' concerns. Last year, USPS gave her staff a briefing on their plans to address staffing shortages and alleviate service disruptions. Her district includes that King of Prussia facility, and her office has already received three times the number of constituent complaints about mail service that they got in all of 2021. She asked Mr. Vaccarella what the USPS is doing to attract more workers and address the onboarding problems Mr. Butts had described.

Vaccarella said they were pursuing this "aggressively," participating in at least 20 job fairs a month in that area. The Philadelphia postmaster had been holding additional job fairs.

Dean asked whether this meant that record numbers of candidates were coming forward. Vaccarella said he didn't know about records, but they've hired more than 2,000 carriers in this district over the past 12 months. They're still struggling with workforce shortages "for various reasons."

Dean asked Mr. Butts about the S&DC initiative — what is that? Butts said it stands for "sorting and delivery consolidation," an initiative implemented by Postmaster General DeJoy. It's supposed to help with logistics.

Dean said that from what she was hearing, this consolidation seemed to be contributing to delays and disruptions. She asked Mr. Alberg where the initiative to defund the Postal Police had come from.

Alberg said he didn't know whether that decision had come from PMG DeJoy or Chief Postal Inspector Barksdale. But Mr. DeJoy has done nothing to rectify the problem. "We have a mail theft epidemic."

Dean said this all seemed like "a very bad set of strategies." She asked Mr. Butts how they prioritized routes for service, because her office is hearing from households that are going multiple days without delivery. How do they get back to daily delivery for everyone?

Butts said he couldn't give a full answer to that question, but prioritization was based on staff availability. They do have a matrix in place to make sure that no one area is missed on consecutive days, but that might not be working operationally. They need to pay closer attention to this, but the real problem is employee retention. Until the USPS is retaining employees, they'll never get employee availability leveled out, and service will never be consistent.

Rep. Houlahan said that the statistics about the decline in number of Postal Police officers was "astounding." How were those decisions made? Who had that authority? Can those decisions be changed? "If there's crime with no punishment, there's more crime."

Mr. Dobbins, who appeared in the opening video, is Rep. Houlahan's constituent. He was assaulted on his letter carrier route, but despite being a federal employee engaged in a federal job, the crime is being investigated on only a local level. She asked Mr. Vaccarella why this couldn't be prosecuted as a federal crime.

Mr. Vaccarella said that first, he'd like to correct Mr. Butts's description of service changes within Pennsylvania — none of the S&DC changes have been implemented in Pennsylvania yet.

Houlahan said she'd like to hear more about that, since some of that King of Prussia service area is in her district, but she repeated her original question: why isn't an assault on a postal carrier being prosecuted as a federal crime?

Vaccarella deferred to his colleague, Peter Rendina, to answer the question. Rendina said that US Postal Inspectors had investigated the case with local police and presented the matter to federal court for prosecution. The federal court declined to prosecute, but now the case is being presented for prosecution at the local level. The US Attorney's Office would have to explain why they declined to prosecute.

Houlahan said she'd be asking them, because she couldn't see any greater deterrent than making something a federal crime and prosecuting it that way.

She's also concerned about unscheduled closures at the Oxford, PA post office, but said her big issue was one similar to Rep. Scanlon's — a post office in West Chester that is ADA noncompliant. Constituents who can't get into the post office are told they need to wait until a worker can come outside to help them, but that's only if they have enough staff to do that. She said they can't discuss proposals to expand postal services until they can make sure that the post offices themselves are accessible to everyone.

Mr. Vaccarella said that the post office in West Chester was in a historic building, and therefore exempt from ADA's architectural barriers requirement. He said that customers who need help can call ahead to request it.

Houlahan said, "Of course it's a historic area, Philadelphia is a historic area." The post office has a ramp in the back that employees can use; why can't customers use that ramp? Vaccarella said that customers weren't allowed in the rear dock or the employee entrance of the post office. Houlahan said she would follow up on this, because she knows that other post offices in historic buildings have been able to figure this out.

Chair Connolly asked Mr. Rendina to explain the "arrow key" problem Ms. Perez had mentioned.

Rendina said that arrow keys were access devices to get into mail repositories, and that theft of arrow keys had been a big factor in the rise of mail theft. The Postal Inspection Service is addressing it as part of a multi-layered strategy to reduce mail theft. "We're not going to be able to arrest our way out of this issue." Prevention is important, and they're communicating with postal employees, customers, and federal, state, and local partners. Rendina thanked Rep. Fitzgerald for his service as an FBI agent.

They're using technology to address the key and lock situation, but they see mail theft becoming more sophisticated. They are investigating online chat rooms and other networks, and they're working with local police departments.

Rep. Connolly said he was glad to hear this, but pointed to a [Washington Post article from April 30](#) that described the massive surge in mail theft, and specifically from the blue boxes, using arrow keys. It's damaging consumer confidence in the USPS. He said again that it was shocking that less than half of one percent of mail theft cases were being prosecuted.

Rendina said that last year they'd won 1,200 convictions in mail theft cases, but the prosecutions don't always happen in the same year as the crimes.

Connolly said that was still less than half of one percent.

Rendina said that they will aggressively pursue mail theft, but they're also talking to customers about how they can protect themselves — for example, by checking mail pick-up times on drop boxes to make sure that mail won't be sitting in a box overnight.

Connolly pointed out that one change PMG DeJoy had made was to reduce the number of pickups from these mailboxes. In many cases, these mailboxes get only one pick-up a day when they used to get two, and some mailboxes get no pick-ups on Fridays. It's hard for consumers to keep up with those changes, and changes like that make it easier to steal.

Connolly asked Mr. Albergo to confirm again that theft of consumer mail and attacks on postal workers had risen. Mr. Albergo did so. Connolly said that it would have made sense for the PMG to expand the police service and broaden its jurisdiction, but instead he did the opposite. Mr. Albergo agreed.

Connolly said they would be pursuing this issue, and that Ms. Perez could expect additional queries from the Subcommittee. The recent changes "make no sense and frankly put both postal workers and the public at risk." That's unacceptable, he said.

He thanked the witnesses and the committee staff, and wished one staffer, Melanie, a happy birthday. He asked members to submit further questions for the witnesses to the chair.

The hearing was adjourned.