
**Hearing before the
Subcommittee on Government Operations
Committee on Oversight and Reform
United States House of Representatives**



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**Waiting on the Mail: Postal Service Standard Drops in Chicago
and the Surrounding Area**

October 15, 2021

Good morning Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss our work related to the Postal Service's operational changes and service performance.

The mission of the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General is to ensure the efficiency, accountability, and integrity of our nation's Postal Service through independent oversight under the authority of the Inspector General Act of 1978. We take our mission very seriously.

For a long time, Chicago has experienced delays in mail delivery. Last year, the issues intensified, and members of Congress expressed concern about deteriorating mail service. In response, we visited several Chicago post offices to analyze the extent of the problem and see what was causing the service failures.¹ During our visits, we observed mail and parcels that had been sitting for up to 19 days without being delivered. This was driven in part by not having enough employees to fully cover all carrier routes, a challenge that increased for Chicago, along with the rest of the country, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also found the full extent of these delays was not evident in internal postal data systems because they were not reported properly. Accurate data may have allowed postal management to more proactively address these issues.

In addition, during an earlier audit, we found delivery delays were sometimes the result of difficulties that occurred prior to the mail arriving at the post office.² Issues with mail processing and transportation led to mail being sent to post offices late or not fully sorted for the carriers, which in turn, increased the risk of the mail not being delivered on time. As a result of our observations and findings, we made several recommendations to help the Postal Service address these issues.

¹ U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, *Mail Delivery and Customer Service Issues — Select Chicago Stations, Chicago, IL*, Report No. 20-296-R21, February 1, 2021, <https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2021/20-296-R21.pdf>.

² USPS OIG, *Mail Delivery Issues – Graceland Annex, Chicago District*, Report No. DRT-AR-19-001, May 13, 2019, <https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2019/DRT-AR-19-001.pdf>.

To help postal stakeholders more easily find service information, we recently deployed a new service performance website that shows how Chicago and the rest of the country performed over time. Service scores for Chicago were generally worse than the national average, and most of the First-Class Mail scores in Chicago this year have been lower than they were in previous years. Looking at the recent data reported for April through June 2021, Chicago had the second worst service score of all the postal districts for 2-day letter mail. Specifically, the Postal Service only delivered around 82 percent of this mail on time compared to the national average of just over 90 percent.³ However, this 82 percent score marks an improvement over the preceding quarter, and this recent positive trend in service was seen across almost all of Chicago's service scores. We will continue to monitor this trend as the Postal Service releases new service performance information.

Though things seem to be improving, we recognize the importance of timely mail delivery across the country and have a body of work focused on this topic. For example, in the fall of 2020, we issued reports on how the Postal Service's implementation of operational changes across the country impacted service. We found that the operational changes, on top of employee absences due to COVID, negatively impacted the quality and timeliness of mail delivery.⁴

More recently, we looked at nationwide service performance and identified the most common root causes behind service failures. These included insufficient capacity to handle the increase in parcels, sending parcels to the wrong facility, staffing shortages, and mail not being fully sorted when it arrived at the post office.⁵ The Postal Service has plans to address these concerns. However, implementing multiple initiatives to correct these

³ <https://www.uspsoidg.gov/service-performance>.

⁴ USPS OIG, *Operational Changes to Mail Delivery*, Report No. 20-292-R21, October 19, 2020, <https://www.uspsoidg.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2020/20-292-R21.pdf>, and USPS OIG, *Deployment of Operational Changes*, Report No. 21-014-R21, November 6, 2020, <https://www.uspsoidg.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2020/21-014-R21.pdf>.

⁵ USPS OIG, *Nationwide Service Performance*, Report No. 21-120-R21, September 20, 2021, <https://www.uspsoidg.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2021/21-120-R21.pdf>.

issues will be challenging, especially now, as the Postal Service is entering the holiday peak season.

Timely mail delivery will continue to be a focus of our work. This work is vital to ensuring the American public has an efficient Postal Service. We will soon release a report on the Postal Service's readiness for the upcoming holiday season. Another project will assess how the Postal Service manages its delivery operations, with a focus on undelivered routes. In a third project, we will be reviewing the 10 lowest performing mail processing plants, which include two in greater Chicago. We will look at multiple data sources to determine what is causing their poor performance and what solutions should be considered.

We understand that getting mail on time is critical to everyone. We look forward to continuing to work with you to evaluate service concerns in Chicago, as well as the rest of the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work. I am happy to answer your questions.