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

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The Holiday Rush: Is the Postal Service Ready?

November 16, 2022

Good afternoon, 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 readiness for peak season. Our mission is to ensure efficiency, accountability, and integrity in our nation's Postal Service. We take our mission very seriously.

We provide oversight of the Postal Service throughout the year, with additional focus on times when America relies on the Postal Service the most — such as during elections and the holiday "peak" season. Our goal is to quickly identify and report problems, allowing the Postal Service to promptly address them, and providing transparency to postal stakeholders.

Each year, we review the Postal Service's readiness for the upcoming peak season and report on what we see. After the holidays, we issue a report on performance during peak season. Last year, the Postal Service moved to a strategy of maintaining more employees and facility space year round. This strategy, along with hiring temporary employees and leasing temporary facility space, allowed the Postal Service to successfully deliver more mail on time throughout the holiday season.[1]

We just released this year's report on the Postal Service's readiness for the current peak season. The Postal Service plans to hire fewer temporary employees and lease less temporary space than last year. Postal management said it will still be able to provide timely delivery because it has more experienced employees, higher employee availability, increased package processing capacity, and an overall more stable workforce. They also do not expect an increase in volume compared to last year.[2]

Because the Postal Service has a reasonable plan for peak, we did not issue any recommendations. We did, however, find the Postal Service is at risk of not being able to lease as much temporary facility space as planned. The Postal Service said acquiring temporary annexes can be difficult, and space was not available in some locations. It will activate contingency plans if needed, including using tents and transferring mail to other postal facilities.

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[1] United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS OIG), *Service Performance During the Fiscal Year 2022 Peak Mailing Season,* Report No. 22-039-R22, June 23, 2022, https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2022/22-039-R22.pdf.
[2] USPS OIG, *Fiscal Year 2023 Peak Season Preparedness*, Report No. 22-163-R23, November 14, 2022.

Election Mail processing is another focus at the OIG. This past September, we published a report on the Postal Service's readiness for the 2022 mid-term election. We found the Postal Service was generally ready, but not all postal facilities were compliant with Election Mail policies.[3] We are wrapping up our review of 2022 mid-term Election Mail performance and will report on that in early 2023. For that work, in October and early November, we conducted more than 800 observations at postal facilities covering all 50 states, as well as Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. This extensive effort is used to identify delayed Election Mail, determine compliance with policies, and evaluate service performance. Leveraging an OIG-engineered mobile app, we provided timely feedback during our field visits to the Postal Service for immediate action.

In addition to our peak season and Election Mail efforts, we have other audit work focused on quickly recognizing and reporting issues for resolution throughout the year. Last fall, we created new audit teams that perform localized, facility-specific reviews. These teams perform a cluster of audits simultaneously. While one team visits a mail processing plant, other teams visit three to four delivery units that receive mail from that plant. This enables us to better focus on service issues in specific geographic areas that span across processing and delivery.[4]

We have also begun recent work to address concerns about mail theft, specifically focused on checks, credit cards, and other sensitive documents. One reason for increased theft has been the Postal Service's poor management controls over arrow keys — the keys used by carriers to open collection boxes, parcel lockers, and cluster box units.[5] In response to this concern, we increased focus on arrow key management during our facility visits and have recently started an audit on how the Postal Service is responding to mail theft. We have also increased investigative work on this critical topic.

Another focus of our work is the importance of mail to people who live in rural areas.[6] One of our upcoming audit reports will evaluate how the Postal Service manages changes to rural routes, and another will assess the Postal Service's oversight of its Contract Postal Units and Village Post Offices, which are often used in rural areas.

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[3] USPS OIG, *Election Mail Readiness for the 2022 Mid-Term Elections*, Report No. 22-093-R22, September 26, 2022, https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2022/22-093-R22.pdf.
[4] A list of our Field Operation Reviews is on this webpage: https://www.uspsoig.gov/field-operation-reviews-select-plant-and-delivery-units.
[5] USPS OIG, *Arrow Key Management Controls,* Report No. 19-033-R20, August 31, 2020, https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2020/19-033-R20.pdf.
[6] An example of our past work is: USPS OIG, *Addressing the Diverse Needs and Wants of Rural America: Opportunities for the U.S. Postal Service,* Report No. RISC-WP-19-009, September 16, 2009, https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2019/RISC-WP-19-009.pdf.

We are dedicated to ensuring proper oversight of the Postal Service. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work, and I am happy to answer your questions.