United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 15, 2026

Mr. David P. Steiner
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20260-3500

Dear Postmaster General Steiner,

We write in strong opposition to the USPS' decision to codify its decision to abandon the goal of timely postmarks by downgrading mail processing services. We urge you to immediately reverse the underlying mail processing changes which contribute significantly to new postmark delays, including the policy described in the new USPS Postmarks and Postal Possession Final Rule. Moving away from postmarking mailpieces on the date they are received into the postal system presents significant negative consequences for millions of Americans conducting commercial transactions, government functions, which alarmingly includes voting.

On December 24, 2025, the Postal Service added a new section to its Domestic Mail Manual, formally stating "the postmark date does not inherently or necessarily align with the date on which the Postal Service first accepted possession of the mailpiece." This means that many voters and other users of the Postal Service could no longer receive a postmark the day they cast their ballot or drop off their tax forms in the mail. Instead, they will receive a postmark date when their mail reaches a regional processing center, which is likely to be significantly further away from their community due to recent USPS consolidations.

This misguided decision to delay postmarks has potentially harmful implications for our election system, and vote-by-mail. Many states determine whether a mail-in ballot can be counted using the postmark date. Election officials are already concerned and warning that this change could ultimately lead to higher mailed ballots being rejected.

Postmarks delays are especially problematic in states that vote entirely or largely by mail. Rural areas across the country will be especially impacted as experts estimate at least a one-day delay in postmark and mail delivery in rural areas. In theory, a rural voter could submit their ballot in time according to their state law, but due to the changes you are implementing, their legally-cast ballot would not be counted as it sits in a local post office. As we enter a year with many local and federal elections, the risk of disrupting this vital democratic process demands your attention and action.

We should be working to make voting easier for eligible voters, not harder. These changes will only increase the likelihood of voter disenfranchisement. While voters can request a manual postmark at a post office, this is unrealistic for millions of voters who vote by mail and will only serve to discourage mail voting. Inevitably, many voters will not learn about the changes to their

postal service until it is too late, creating uncertainty about whether their vote will be able to count.

Postmarks that do not match the date a mailpiece is first received by the USPS are often the direct result of eliminating twice daily mail dispatches from local post offices to regional processing centers under the Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO) plan. Now, many mailpieces received after the first and only transfer truck leaves will sit overnight until the next daily transfer. This service downgrade should be reversed.

Delayed postmarks further pressure a mail delivery system struggling under the weight of ill-conceived cost-cutting measures. In recent years, mail processing facility closures and consolidations implemented under the disastrous "Delivering for America" plan have caused delays in mail delivery, affecting vital services like prescription deliveries, bill payments, and other essential communications. Seniors, rural residents, and small business owners have been particularly impacted by downgraded postal services. In addition to election and tax implications, delayed postmarks will result in late fees, missed legal document submissions, application denials, overdue notices, and increased costs for the American people.

In addition to restoring timely postmarks and ensuring voters aren't negatively impacted, we urge the Postal Service to promptly engage cooperatively with union representatives to fully stand up the Postal Election Mail Task Force. Early engagement between management and postal workers will help ensure all necessary extraordinary measures are well understood and ready for implementation as election mail comes in for processing.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing your plans to address these concerns and request a response no later than 14 days from today.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator