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AND PENSIONS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4607

May 26, 2023

Mr. Scott Slusher
Director, Government Liaison
U.S. Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Mr. Slusher:

In the past, I have shared correspondence my office has received detailing examples of frustrating experiences with mail delivery. Unfortunately, I must share some new ones. I am summarizing them below to give you a sense of the types of complaints we are receiving. I request that you review these concerns, provide information on how these are being addressed, and share what factors are causing what appear to be systemic challenges with processing mail promptly and getting it successfully to the right place.

In the **Town of Chilhowie, Virginia**, my casework team began receiving complaints from customers about utility bills sent out November 30, 2022 with December 15 due dates that were not even received by customers as of December 16. A casework inquiry submitted December 21 and a USPS response on January 17 indicated that some bills were sent on December 13 and 14 (again, for a December 15 due date). My casework team received the same complaints for January and February bills. This is a town of some 2,000 residents.

Thomas Bridge Water Corporation is a nonprofit organization that provides drinking water in the Marion, Virginia area to over 1,800 households. On February 1, the Corporation mailed out bills and learned that no one had received them as of February 13. My office followed up in March, and the Corporation reported that on March 10, out of the bills mailed on March 1, at least 50% of customers had not received them. The Corporation also noted that customers are complaining about repeatedly receiving late fees:

“Although happy with the slight improvement from last month, we feel that the postal service is still having issues getting the bills to our customers in a timely manner. This has caused issues not only for us as a company, but also for our customers who are upset over past due/late fee charges caused by the delay in delivery. We are constantly receiving phone calls from customers, complaining about these issues. We have not shut any ones water off but penalties and fees are most definitely an issue.”

My casework team has also worked to advocate for Virginians who rely on the Postal Service to deliver medications and have experienced significant mail delays. In one such case, a Virginian in Roanoke was only receiving mail twice per week and when my team raised the issue with USPS, we received the following response:

“After investigation and consultation with local management, they confirmed that mail delivery can be later in the day when employees are out and the routes have to be split among the carriers that show up to work. However, the office is seeking additional resources so that when a carrier is out they have adequate coverage on the open route. The office has confirmed that the route is current with no delivery delays. Once again, please allow us to apologize for the unfortunate customer experience.”

Other Virginians have waited even longer to receive their mail. I heard from one company in Henrico, Virginia that did not receive mail for two weeks. Prior to these two weeks of non-delivery, mail was infrequent and arriving as late as 10pm. When the company filed a separate complaint online before reaching out to our office, they were told to call the local post office. Upon multiple attempts, no one ever answered the phone during business hours.

Not only are Virginians waiting long periods of time for their deliveries, I’ve heard from some who have noticed that critical items are never delivered at all. A Virginian in Arlington repeatedly went several days without mail over the period of several months and did not receive specific items, including a Virginia Auto Registration from the DMV and a Virginia Driver’s license. This was the received response for this case from the USPS:

“After investigation and consultation with local management, it has been found that the office may experience delivery delays due to employee availability issues. However, they are taking the steps necessary to ensure every effort has been made to deliver the mail daily. The route in which your constituent resides is current however delivery on this route maybe later in the day. Once again, please allow us to apologize for the unfortunate customer experience.”

The situations are not specific to particular regions of Virginia. I am concerned that Virginia communities as far-flung as Smyth County in Southwest Virginia, the Richmond area (nearly 300 miles away from Chilhowie by highway), and Arlington, across the river from Washington, D.C., are all experiencing missing bills, medications, tax documents, and days/weeks without mail. To better understand these issues, I respectfully request responses to the following questions:

- In previous correspondence, USPS has indicated that staffing shortages connected to the COVID-19 pandemic are largely responsible for delays. The casework responses to some of these cases indicate that insufficient staffing continues to be an issue with some of these delays. But now that we are closer to an overall post-pandemic posture, to what degree is this still a problem, and why?
- Are there region-specific bottlenecks in any of these regions – Southwest Virginia, Richmond/Central Virginia, Northern Virginia – that can explain these challenges, and if so, could you summarize what changes are being made to address this?
- Beyond the Postal Service Reform Act, are there other systemic changes you believe policymakers should consider that would have the overall effect of reducing these types of issues?

My constituents are understandably frustrated and eager to know if help is on the way. I appreciate any information you can share. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

