

**STATEMENT OF DOROTHY R. LEAVELL, PUBLISHER
OF THE CHICAGO CRUSADER
ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION AND
ILLINOIS PRESS ASSOCIATION**

**Before the Subcommittee on Government Operations of the
Committee on Oversight and Reform**

Chicago, Illinois

October 15, 2021

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the concerns of the Chicago Crusader regarding its partnership with the US Postal Service to reach our subscribers.

I am Dorothy Leavell. I have been publisher of the Chicago Crusader for 53 years and of its sister newspaper, the Gary, Indiana, Crusader for 53 years as well. The Crusaders were founded by the late Balm L. Leavell, Jr. At his death in 1968, I took over as head of our publications. I was in my mid-20s at the time, barely aware of the many challenges of running community newspapers. Over the years, I have led our newspapers through multitudes of changes, both in our industry, in our communities and in the nation. I served as president and chair of the National Newspaper Publishers Association in 1995 – 1999 and 2017-2019 respectively, where I advocated for the concerns of the Black Press in America.

I believe my long-standing expertise at the helm of the respected Crusader newspapers qualifies me to state unequivocally that America needs a strong Postal Service. Despite our many challenges as postal customers, I deeply believe that weakening the country's commitment to universal service works to the detriment of people in our communities who rely on the mail. As a small businessperson, I can also state unequivocally that it is ALL of us, who rely on

the mail. I thank the subcommittee for its attention to the critical issues facing the United States Postal Service.

The Crusader newspaper is available around Chicago at many drop points, including bulk sales at major retail establishments. We have about 900 readers who want to receive our newspaper by mail, which they pay for with a subscription. Mail delivery is essential for these readers for a variety of reasons. These subscribers are important to our mission as a clarion to Black Chicago and the larger metro area. They also are critical for our revenue stream, both as subscribers and as potential customers for our advertisers.

Our mail is entered as Periodicals Mail (formerly second-class mail) each Thursday at the Business Mail Entry facility in the main Chicago Post Office. We request delivery on Fridays and at the latest on Saturdays. When the weekend delivery is missed, our subscribers lose out on many opportunities: information about weekend events, church services, civic engagements, and sports news as well as consumer opportunities such as sales and promotions that may have limited availability over a weekend.

Our newspaper also fulfills a serious responsibility to local governing units by serving as a newspaper of record for public notices, such as tax levy and budget hearings. These public notices are almost always time sensitive and must reach readers within specified time periods in order for the requirements of ordinances and statutes to be fulfilled.

Thus, timeliness is critical and reliable mail delivery is an essential component of a successful newspaper like ours.

Mail delivery, however, is a perpetual challenge for a newspaper like ours.

It has never been as reliable as we need it to be. During the pandemic, it has been worse than ever. Yet, over my 60-year career, I find that my business has had to assume more and more responsibility for preparing the mail to ever-more exacting specifications, which is an expense for us. This year, our efforts have been rewarded with postage increases of nearly 9 percent. We understand that in coming years, the Postal Service plans to increase our rates twice a year.

There is no way for a newspaper like ours to recover this rising cost.

Households in our community have mounting expenses for rent, food, fuel, and

other essentials. It is an insult to our readers to be expected to pay for much higher subscriptions when mail service is unreliable. This formula of declining service and higher rates puts newspapers like ours in a terrible predicament.

Here are some examples of problems we have run into over the past year.

- Some subscribers within the metro area do not receive their newspapers on Friday or even Saturday. If delivery does not occur by the weekend, the newspaper may take a week to reach them. These delays are not caused by any changes in our mail preparation or entry times—we are doing the same things we have done like clockwork, 52-weeks a year, for decades.**
- Outside the Chicago area, we sometimes hear complaints of no delivery at all. We had to send one subscriber in Colorado copies of our newspaper for July, August, and September this year because the mail failed him completely in those months.**
- Address correction service has become unreliable and costly. We often receive multiple notices in a batch for address changes. The Postal Service will refund the postage charge for duplicates, but the staff time required to make that application is more costly than the amount of the refund.**
- We sometimes receive “undeliverable” notices when we know full well that the subscriber is at that address and waiting for his or her newspaper. This year, for example, we got a notice that a subscriber was deceased. We didn’t think he was. So, we wrote him a letter and sent it by First-Class Mail. Sure enough, he responded with some indignation that he was indeed very much alive. We have no idea why someone in the post office thought he was not.**
- We receive complaints from subscribers who do not get their mail on time. Often, they threaten to cancel their subscriptions, so we have to invest our staff’s time in talking with the subscribers to explain that the**

problem is not with the Crusader but with the Post Office. Sometimes they decide to stay with us; sometimes they cancel. Whether we retain them or not, the cost of serving these subscribers is unfairly elevated because of postal problems.

- Some 10 or so years ago we invested in receiving our mail on the day it reached our local post office by purchasing a Post Office Box. We still retain this service however, we find that we must make several trips per day to receive any mail that may have arrived. Often our mail is received late that result in late payment of utility bills, etc. costing us additional money as well. Customer payments to us are often delayed and require staff to spend additional time in collections.**
- Our experiences in Gary, Indiana, where we also utilize Periodicals or Second Class Mailing, are almost identical to our Chicago experiences. Subscribers receive their printed copy of the Gary Crusader extremely late, sometimes as much as a week. Returns of the newspapers during the pandemic has been unusually high, compared to other years and duplicate returns being held until three or more are the same.**
- Decisions by USPS, warranted or unwarranted, now require us to deliver our newspapers for distribution to Hammond, Indiana. A previously short trip to the main post office in Gary, now is an additional cost to our distribution costs to Hammond.**

As regular weekly mailers, we are aware of the many challenges facing USPS. Although our Business Mail Entry people are unfailingly polite and accommodating, they are unable to assure that our mail will be on time. After our mail leaves their hands, it goes through a bewildering system of changed mail sorting arrangements, personnel turnover, critical staffing holes created by COVID-19 absences, different truck routes and a host of complications the nature of which I can conjure up only in my worst nightmares. I attach with my statement two of the stories we have written on the situation with Chicago's mail system.

Newspaper mail may not be the highest profile mail in the USPS system. But our mail is important to our readers. They know when their copy is supposed to arrive. When it doesn't, both USPS and our newspaper suffer from a loss of reputation. In fact, I would say that the perception of USPS being threatened or of its imminent demise has been enhanced because people don't get their newspapers on time. They figure that if the newspaper is late, whatever else someone is trying to send them is late as well. If the newspaper cannot be delivered on time, what hope do they have when they send in their utility payment or their mortgage checks?

Members of Congress have allowed the slow demise of our Postal System to go on too long. I appreciate the efforts of this Subcommittee to draw the attention of others in Congress to the plight of the Postal Service. I would be happy to answer any questions from the subcommittee.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dorothy R. Leavell". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Dorothy R. Leavell
Editor and Publisher

THE CHICAGO Crusader



Blacks Must Control Their Own Community
www.chicagocrusader.com

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To The Unconquerable Host of Africans Who Are Laying Their Sacrifices Upon the Editorial Altar For Their Race

Report identifies four of the worst post offices in the city

By Patrick Forrest

Residents on the city's South and Southwest sides got some of the first official answers following months of missing mail, in the form of an inspector general report outlining major defects in four postal locations.

At post office branches located at 83rd and Ashland; 77th and Cottage Grove; 46th and Cottage Grove; and the 3600 block of West 79th Street, more than 60,000 pieces of mail were delayed between September, 2020 and February, 2021.

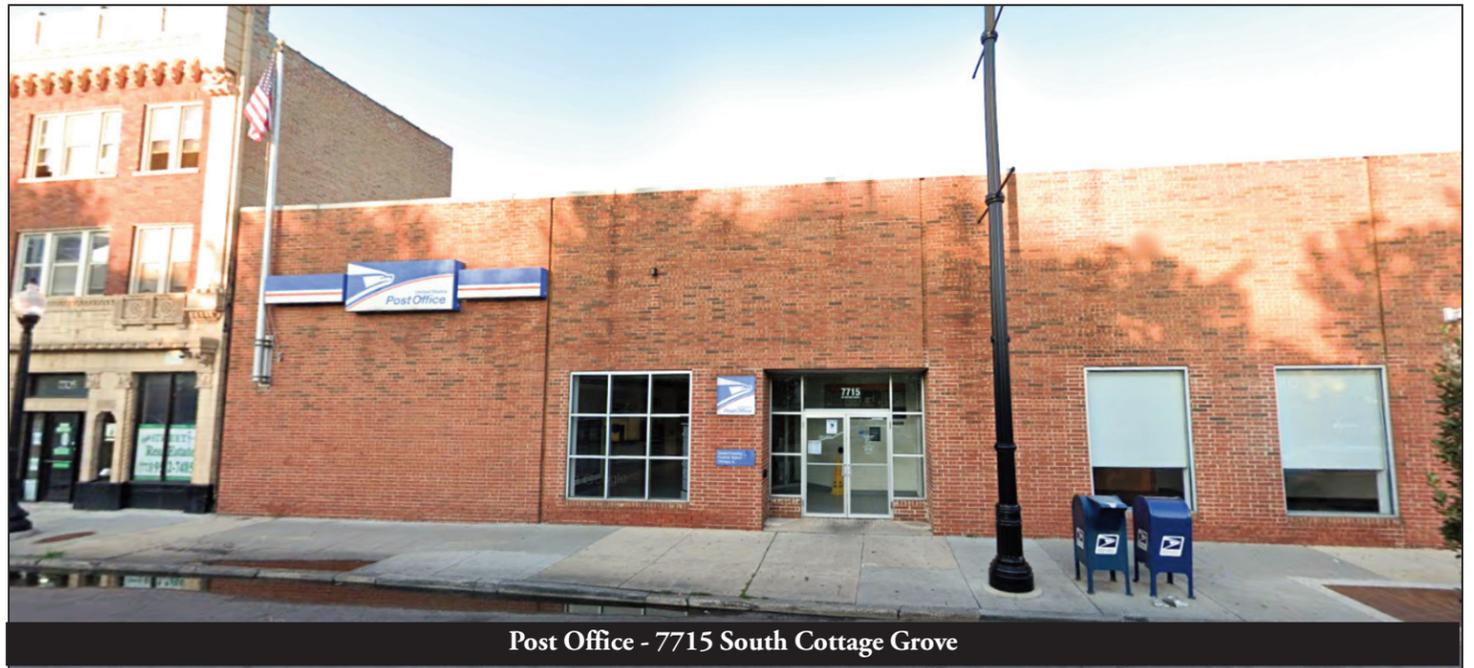
With the release of the report, Congressman Bobby Rush demanded the removal of the Chicago Postmaster, Wanda Prater, alongside Mayor John D. Ryan of Alsip, IL, and several aldermen.

"People who depend on the postal service, seniors, families, other people depending on the postal service day-in and day-out, it's an absolute, epic, total, undeniable failure," Rush said. "I can only conclude and demand that Postmaster Prater resign immediately, or she be terminated immediately."

Prater, whose base salary according to the Office of Personnel Management was \$98,885 when she assumed the Postmaster position in 2014, manages postal operations from 433 W. Harrison, popularly referred to as "the Main Post Office."

The USPS Inspector General investigation was requested by Rush after a virtual town hall meeting in July 2020 that drew more than 3,500 participants who all complained about delayed and undelivered mail. The investigation took place in September 2020. All the information in the report occurred during that period.

The report details repeated and apparent intentional inaccurate reporting of conditions at the Auburn Park (8345 S. Ashland), Henry McGee ((4601 S. Cottage Grove), Ashburn (3639 W. 79th St.), and James E. Worsham (7715 S. Cottage Grove) stations.



Post Office - 7715 South Cottage Grove

During the period the investigation occurred three stations did not report any non-deliveries and the Auburn Park Station reported 329 non-deliveries the day before the inspectors arrived. Inspectors found 18,785 non-deliveries for all four stations on that day.

Rush was not the only federal official to make calls for changes at the post office, with Senator Dick Durbin also joining the calls for changes at the leadership level.

"They need to take an assessment of resources," Illinois' senior senator said. "They don't have enough resources to get the job done. They need some hard and fast rules. Two-day delivery was the standard for years and now it's not even close."

District Manager Randy Shines did offer some defense for the under-performing stations, deflecting some blame onto the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest the city saw following the death of George Floyd.

"It's important to note that during the time frame of the audit we were dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and had several hundred carriers off the dock due to leave," Shines said in a letter attached to the published report.

"Couple that with the civil unrest we saw leading up to the audit and the carrier that was shot four times in the leg and once in the head, and we had a lot of employees not coming to work due to fear of being on the street."

Despite the additional comment left



Post Office - 8345 South Ashland



4601 South Cottage Grove

by Shines, recommendations were still made of him to begin to watch the reporting of these four stations more closely, which some still hope will lead to

more consistent delivery.

"The post office is important and we need them back on the ball," said Margaret Jones, a 77-year-old Chat-ham resi-

dent whose home is serviced by one of the offices. "I don't know if this is what they need to do it, but we need them to get back on it."



THE RONA REPORT | STORIES OF BLACK RESILIENCE

Pandemic takes toll on U.S. Postal Service; workers continue to bear the brunt

By Stephanie Gadlin
Special to the Crusader

Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night may be able to slow the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), but federal cuts, a reduction in its workforce and an ineradicable pandemic have caused delays in mail delivery that has brought the service to a crawl. To add insult to injury, the strange and glaring red locks on stand-alone mailboxes throughout the city's Black community are vivid reminders that something beyond the virus is amidst.

The U.S. Department of Labor shows the global pandemic has ravaged the U.S. workforce causing 1 in 4 employees to work and sending 31.3 million people toward the unemployment line.

USPS has seen 60 postal workers die from symptoms related to COVID-19 according to statistics made available by government agencies. Nearly 2,500 have tested positive for the coronavirus-related disease, while 17,000—or 3 percent of the USPS workforce most of whom cannot work remotely—have been sent home on quarantine.

That, along with the removal of sorting equipment from post offices around the country, denying overtime pay and a delay in hiring and the onboarding of new staff, have caused a backlog of mail delivery. While first-class mail has slowed, items sent via second-class mail, such as the weekly **Chicago Crusader** or those sent at a bulk-rate, might not be delivered for weeks on end.

The service told lawmakers that after the pandemic hit in early March, mail declined 30 percent. By the end of June, the agency said volume had dropped to 50 percent putting the postal service in the crosshairs of a workforce crisis and a

loss in revenue.

Retired letter carrier Jerri-Lynn Johnson said the delays are a direct result of the pandemic and the continued effort by some politicians to defund the postal service. The South Side native spent 37 years working for USPS, mainly at the Jackson Park branch, 700 E. 61st Street, before retiring February 2018.

"The pandemic hit (USPS) hard," Johnson said. "People called off sick, many of whom were afraid of catching the virus. That left a lot of people without clerks to deliver mail. Those that didn't take sick days worked double shifts just to keep up. All of my friends who are still serving said it also didn't help that the postmaster general had the sorting machines removed.

"That means someone has to sort all of that mail by hand," Johnson said. "That is humanly impossible in a metropolis like Chicago. When people call in sick, the routes become overwhelmed because there's fewer people, or in some cases, no people to actually deliver the mail. The workers who are there do their regular routes for eight hours now have to do another person's route. This has them doing 12-hour days. It's overwhelming."

Mack Julion, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers Local 11, echoed those remarks earlier this summer. "They (carriers) are doing this job with their hands tied behind their back," he said during a news conference. "It is a combination of the organizational system, failed policy issues of the Chicago post office, understaffing and decisions made about delivery. Start times for carriers have been pushed back and not having adequate resources to cover the area. We had low staffing levels before, and the pandemic



JERRI-LYNN JOHNSON (pictured above) is a retired letter carrier who recently shared her insights and concerns about the U.S. Postal Services with the Chicago Crusader.

has exposed these issues."

Adding to the public scrutiny is the surge in mail-in ballots expected to be cast in this year's presidential election. More than 80 million voters are expected to vote by mail to avoid polling places and the risk of being exposed to COVID-19, which has claimed 184,083 lives in the U.S. as of this report.

A global pandemic has ravaged the post office, but hasn't stopped the Postmaster General Louis DeJoy from telling Congress he will move forward with his plan to cut services, close locations, remove processing machines and other changes until after the Nov. 3 election. And though Congress has shelled out an initial \$2.2 trillion in pandemic relief, USPS has yet to receive a bailout.

DeJoy's blatant alleged attacks on USPS came before Minority Leader Senator Charles E. Schumer's (D-NY) demand for an investigation into his \$75 million investment in private postal companies, such as United Parcel Service (UPS), JB Hunt and XPO Logistics, a postal contractor.

USPS employs about 630,000 workers and serves 160 million homes, businesses and other delivery points. It receives no funding from taxpayers.

Calling the smooth delivery of mail a matter of "life and death," in a letter to DeJoy, congressional leaders, including U.S. Rep. Danny K. Davis (7th) and U.S. Rep. Bobby L. Rush (1st), pressed the urgency to protect the postal service during the pandemic.

"The House is seriously concerned that you are implementing policies that

accelerate the crisis at the Postal Service, including directing post offices to no longer treat all election mail as first-class. If implemented now, as the election approaches, this policy will cause further delays to election mail that will disenfranchise voters and put significant financial pressure on election jurisdictions," the leaders wrote.

Johnson delivered mail throughout the city but spent most of her years of service delivering to Woodlawn, Hyde Park and some of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods. "Even though I had to deal with the possibility of getting caught in gunfire or bitten by dogs or finding drugs hidden in mailboxes, the rewards outweigh the risk," she said. "I got to meet a lot of great customers and when you're on a route as long as I was you become a part of their extended family. [USPS] is a great career, and it has offered a lot of career longevity (in our community).

"What's happening now is troubling, and it angers me to see this going down like this," she continued. "I talk to my friends everyday who are still out there doing the best they can."

Today, 21 percent of USPS workers are African American. Though Mary "Stagecoach" Fields has been recorded as the nation's first Black star route mail carrier, the largest hires of Blacks began in post-Civil War 1865—some 63 years after Congress proclaimed "after the 1st day of November next, no other than a free white person shall be employed in carrying the mail of the United States, on any of the post-roads, either as a post-

man or driver of a carriage carrying the mail."

After President Roosevelt banned discrimination in federal hiring, the number of African Americans receiving postal jobs increased significantly.

The General Accounting Office reports the Postal Service has accumulated \$160.9 billion in debt, in part, because of a 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act deal to prepay health and retiree benefits at a cost of about \$5.6 billion per year. The U.S. Department of Treasury has yet to approve a \$10 billion loan to the agency through the Cares Act, which would ensure employees are paid through March 2021.

A postal worker delivering in the 60621 zip code and who asked not to be named for this story, put it simply, "They're trying to break us down, but we're going to keep going, keep fighting," the person said.

Earlier this month, Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul joined 13 other attorney generals in a federal lawsuit declaring spending cuts and equipment removal as illegal.

The Rona Reports are stories of Black resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of Chicago's Black newspapers with a citywide distribution our mission is to provide readers with factual news and in-depth coverage of its impact in the Black community. The Rona Report is funded by the Facebook Journalism Project Community Network grant.

