



May 6, 2020

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Congress Must Provide Robust Funding for the United States Postal Service

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and the 105 undersigned organizations, we urge you to support robust funding for the United States Postal Service (USPS) in the next coronavirus response package. The hundreds of thousands of people who make up the USPS are essential workers providing a critical public service to the people of our nation amid a global pandemic, all while facing uncertainty about their own personal health and the fiscal health of the constitutionally-mandated agency at which they work. Congress must act now to save the USPS, the hundreds of thousands of jobs included in its diverse workforce, and the communities that depend upon this critical federal agency. A vote against adequate, timely funding for the USPS is an anti-civil rights vote.

We are deeply concerned about the financial insecurity facing the USPS as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The USPS does not accept appropriations and is dependent on the sale of postal services and products for revenue to carry out its public service mission of connecting our country. Today, the USPS projects that it will lose \$2 billion each month because of loss of revenue from an unprecedented drop in mail during the pandemic. Despite this financial hit, USPS carriers have been essential in our nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, continuing to deliver essential mail and parcels, such as prescriptions, food, and household necessities.¹ And their service during this pandemic has come at a cost and at great personal risk. Nearly 1,979 postal workers have tested positive for the coronavirus and 1,000 others are sick, in quarantine, and presumed to be positive. More than 40 postal employees have died; over 6,000 are in self-quarantine because of exposure.² Just as in 2001, when the nation was facing bioterrorism from anthrax attacks in the wake of 9/11, it was postal workers on the front lines.³ We owe it to these brave essential workers to shore up the financial health of the Postal Service.

The USPS has long been the most popular federal agency in the nation, with 91 percent of people in our country holding a favorable opinion about the agency.⁴ The USPS is legally required to deliver all mail at a flat rate to all postal addresses in all regions in our country,

¹ Bogage, Jacob. "White House rejects bailout for U.S. Postal Service battered by coronavirus." *The Washington Post*. April 11, 2020. <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/white-house-rejects-bailout-for-u-s-postal-service-battered-by-coronavirus/>

² The American Postal Workers Union. "Response to President Trump's remarks today that he will block coronavirus aid for the U.S. Postal Service." April 24, 2020. <https://www.apwu.org/news/reponse-president-trump%E2%80%99s-remarks-today-he-will-block-coronavirus-aid-us-postal-service>

³ Rein, Lisa. "Postal workers mark 10-year anniversary of anthrax attacks." *The Washington Post*. October 21, 2011. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/postal-workers-mark-10-year-anniversary-of-anthrax-attacks/2011/10/21/gIQA4E1F4L_story.html

⁴ Pew Research Center. "Public Expresses Favorable Views of a Number of Federal Agencies." October 1, 2019. <https://www.people-press.org/2019/10/01/public-expresses-favorable-views-of-a-number-of-federal-agencies/>



no matter how far it may have to travel or how profitable the work. It has more than 31,600 retail locations and employs more than 650,000 people from diverse backgrounds that serve every rural, suburban, and urban community around the country.

Over the years, the USPS has also been an important employer of people of color and served as one of the linchpins of many communities. The USPS is one of the only federal agencies whose workforce reflects our nation's demographics. The agency is one of the leading employers of people of color and women, who each make up 40 percent of the workforce.⁵ Additionally, 21 percent of USPS employees are African American, 8 percent are Hispanic, 8 percent are Asian American Pacific Islander, and .67 percent are American Indian or Alaska Native.⁶ The USPS has also long been a path to the middle class for African Americans in particular, paving the way for economic opportunity for a community that has faced countless barriers due to years of structural and economic racism.⁷ Postal Service careers provide a steady stream of income and benefits to employees, serve as a vehicle for families trying to work their way out of poverty, and support the same communities that they serve. USPS has been a career lifeline for many, and we should aim to preserve these opportunities for the individuals, families, and communities that rely on them to achieve economic security rather than throwing its more than 650,000 employees into the unemployment line.

The Postal Service's accessibility and affordability is also important to rural communities, seniors, and people with disabilities, who might not otherwise be able to afford the cost of a private business to deliver essential medications and daily necessities. More than half the people who have their medicine delivered at home are over the age of 65, and 54 percent of this group takes more than four different types of medication.⁸ Were USPS to shut down, these individuals would be left without an affordable option to access vital medicines. People with disabilities rely on the USPS to mail their prescriptions for similar reasons. Many of these individuals are unable to leave their homes, let alone travel to the closest pharmacy or city to pick up their prescriptions. A number of these individuals are veterans enrolled in the Veterans Affairs (VA) "Meds by Mail" program, which delivers medications to their homes.⁹ A shutdown of USPS could ultimately disrupt the critical VA services that serve this vulnerable population.

The accessibility and affordability that USPS provides is particularly vital for rural and tribal communities. Without the USPS' public service commitment to provide the "last mile" of delivery, rural and tribal communities may be excluded from mail services entirely by private companies that may not find it profitable to continue rural postal routes. If they do provide services, the rates charged to rural and tribal people may be prohibitively high. A good example of what accessibility and affordability for rural and tribal communities looks like in the absence of a federal agency committed to a public service mission like USPS is their current access to broadband internet service. Currently, over 90 percent of

⁵ United States Postal Service. "Workforce Diversity and Inclusiveness." https://about.usps.com/strategic-planning/cs09/CSPO_09_087.htm

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jones, Sarah. "The U.S. Postal Service Needs Help Now: 'The Situation is Absolutely Dire.'" *New York Magazine*, April 17, 2020. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/04/will-republicans-help-the-coronavirus-kill-the-post-office.html>

⁸ National Community Pharmacists Association. "Medication Adherence in America: A National Report Card." http://www.ncpa.co/adherence/AdherenceReportCard_Full.pdf

⁹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "Prescription medications delivered right to your door!" https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/docs/pubfiles/brochures/MbM_brochure.pdf#



tribal reservations lack access to broadband.¹⁰ On tribal lands, the Federal Communications Commission estimates that Native Americans have to pay approximately one and half times the average rate providers charge for users in less remote areas.¹¹ And where broadband service is available, many Native Americans report anecdotally that the quality of service is also much poorer. Given this astounding lack of access to broadband, tribal and rural communities often rely on mail service to conduct their business affairs. Cutting service to these communities will further depress economic development and further isolate these vulnerable American citizens.

The USPS is also essential to having a fair and accurate 2020 Census. The Census Bureau and community advocates working on census outreach depend on the USPS to reach hard to count populations in communities across the country. A fair and accurate 2020 Census is essential for effective governance, fair representation, and implementation of civil and human rights protections. An incomplete census robs communities of their fair share of federal resources. While the Census Bureau has adjusted many of the major counting operations in response to the pandemic, it continues to rely on the mail to promote and provide a way for people to respond on their own. The USPS' ability to deliver to every address makes it uniquely suited to help the Census Bureau achieve its goals. Without an effective USPS, rural and remote communities especially are at risk of being missed in the census.

Without Congressional action, the USPS could become insolvent by the end of September 2020.¹² In early April, Postmaster General Megan Brennan asked Congress for \$89 billion in assistance for the USPS to help cover losses from the pandemic, for infrastructure modernization, to deal with debt related to the benefits retirement mandate, and to address other agency needs.¹³ The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) provided the USPS with a \$10 billion loan to ensure continued services throughout the pandemic. This loan, however, is subject to the Treasury Department's approval and is insufficient to address the financial crisis facing the USPS. The bipartisan Postal Service Board of Governors has asked for \$50 billion in emergency grants and appropriations, as well as access to \$25 billion in borrowing authority.¹⁴ The Leadership Conference and the undersigned organizations are supportive of this request. We urge Congress to act swiftly and approve this level of funding to ensure that USPS operations can continue, and to provide critical relief for this agency.

In addition to the financial impact of COVID-19, much of the current fiscal situation that the USPS faces is due to the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA) of 2006. PAEA envisioned the USPS as a self-sustaining, quasi-governmental entity and set the unprecedented requirement that the agency set aside \$5.5 billion per year to prepay health care benefits for future employees. This mandate alone, which Congress has attempted to repeal multiple times, has left the USPS with \$160.9 billion in debt, rendering

¹⁰ Parkhurst, Nichole Deschine, Traci Morris, Emery Tahy and Karen Mossberger. "The digital reality: e-government and access to technology and internet for American Indian and Alaska Native populations." *dg.o '15 (2015)*.
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4bb4/f5efcd1cf4ec342b5d45dd824bb10d9bb0f2.pdf>.

¹¹ "BROADBAND INTERNET: FCC's Data Overstate Access on Tribal Lands." United States Government Accountability Office. September 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/694386.pdf> at 20-21.

¹² Fox, Lauren & Herb, Jeremy. "US Postal Service warns Congress it could become insolvent amid coronavirus." CNN. April 10, 2020.
<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/10/politics/postal-service-congress-help/index.html>

¹³ The Editorial Board. "What's an Essential Service in a Pandemic? The Post Office." *The New York Times*. April 14, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/opinion/usps-coronavirus.html>

¹⁴ <https://cleaver.house.gov/sites/cleaver.house.gov/files/Cleaver%20Postal%20Letter%20Final.pdf>



the agency unable to turn a profit in recent years.¹⁵ Ultimately, comprehensive Congressional reform legislation for the USPS is needed. But in the current term, our nation requires immediate fiscal relief for the USPS.

For the reasons mentioned above, Congress must take action to protect the USPS in the next coronavirus response package. USPS carriers are delivering masks and respirators to the front lines. They are moving test kits to labs. They are ensuring that seniors and people with disabilities can receive the prescription medication they need to survive. At a time where people in America need the Postal Service more than ever, we must prioritize funding to ensure that this agency has the resources it needs.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Emily Chatterjee at chatterjee@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

A. Philip Randolph Institute

Advancement Project

AFL-CIO

AFSCME

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas

All On The Line

Alliance of Baptists

American Federation of Teachers

American Muslim Health Professionals

Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)

Andrew Goodman Foundation

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC)

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)

Asian Counseling and Referral Service

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)

Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Brennan Center for Justice

Center for Disability Rights

Center for Responsible Lending

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

¹⁵ Bogage, Jacob. "The Postal Service needs a bailout. Congress is partly to blame." *The Washington Post*. April 15, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/15/postal-service-bailout-congress/>

Coalition of Labor Union Women
Coalition on Human Needs
Common Cause
Community Change Action
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Democracy 21
Demos
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)
Equal Rights Advocates
Equality North Carolina
Fair Count, Inc.
Faith in Action
Faith in Action Fund
Farmworker Association of Florida
Feminist Majority Foundation
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights Campaign
ICNA Council for Social Justice
Indivisible
International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)
Justice in Aging
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Lake Research Partners
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
League of Conservation Voters
League of Women Voters of the United States
Let America Vote / End Citizens United Action Fund
Matthew Shepard Foundation
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Multicultural Efforts to end Sexual Assault (MESA)
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
NALEO Educational Fund
National Action Network
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Association of Human Rights Workers
National Association of Social Workers
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Law and Economic Justice

National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition for Literacy
National Community Reinvestment Coalition
National Congress of American Indians
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)
National Council of Churches
National Disability Rights Network
National Fair Housing Alliance
National Lawyers Guild
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
Native American Rights Fund
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates
Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinaa, Inc.
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Poligon Education Fund
Public Advocacy for Kids
Public Citizen
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
SPLC Action Fund
Stand Up America
State Voices
Texas Progressive Action Network
The Arc of the United States
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
UnidosUS
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Steelworkers
Voto Latino
Workplace Fairness