

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

May 14, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We write to strongly encourage you to protect and fully support the 633,000 employees of the United States Postal Service (USPS), including nearly 100,000 veterans, who are currently playing a crucial role amid the COVID-19 pandemic. These veteran workers and their colleagues are on the frontlines working to ensure that the American people continue to have access to essential goods and services, including medicine, toiletries, and voter ballots. We ask that you do everything in your capacity to support veteran postal workers by advocating for funding for programs that support the hiring, onboarding, and retention of veterans, along with the USPS as a whole.

The USPS is an essential source of income for thousands of veteran workers and their families, with veterans comprising roughly 15 percent of the entire federal postal workforce, and is one of the largest employers of veterans in the country. For many veterans, the Postal Service provides an invaluable and seamless transition from military service to civilian life working in public service. It also acts as a source of financial security, especially for our disabled veterans, whom the USPS actively recruits and provides a continuing sense of purpose and fulfillment.¹

The White House's actions to prevent stimulus funding for the USPS has the potential to derail the livelihoods of thousands of families with a veteran employed by the USPS, who rely on the benefits, pensions, and salaries associated with their service. In financial crises, veterans are especially vulnerable to unemployment and homelessness. With unemployment approaching historic highs, we should be ensuring veterans are able to keep their jobs.^{2 3} Providing federal

¹ "483 Kinds of Veterans' Preference", United States Postal Service.
https://about.usps.com/handbooks/el312/el312c4_022.htm

² "The Unemployment Rate Is Probably Around 13 Percent", Justin Wolfers, The UpShot, *The New York Times*, April 12, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/03/upshot/coronavirus-jobless-rate-great-depression.html>

³ "New York State Unemployment Rate Is At High Level Since The Great Depression", Mayra Rodriguez Valladares, *Forbes*, April 26, 2020.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mayrarodriguezvalladares/2020/04/26/new-york-state-unemployment-rate-is-at-highest-level-since-the-great-depression/#2b502c9c76f2>

funding to the USPS to support its veteran workers and their colleagues is an effective action Congress can take to help these frontline workers keep their jobs and financial security, and not add to an already growing problem of unemployment among veterans in our country.⁴

Supporting veteran postal workers and their colleagues by providing federal funding not only helps millions of working families, but also their communities that rely on these essential services. In many rural communities, the USPS is the only mail carrier available since many private mail carriers do not provide services in those areas.⁵ This is also true for many low-income communities, communities of color, and tribal lands in the United States. Allowing the Postal Service to dissolve, especially during a pandemic, will only do more harm to these already vulnerable communities with exceptionally severe consequences for veterans in these areas who rely on these jobs, and may already be struggling to access the benefits and support that they require. This includes other veterans, as well, given that the amount of prescription drugs being mailed has surged due to the COVID-19 outbreak, including medication prescribed by the Department of Veterans Affairs and delivered through the USPS.⁶ It cannot be overstated the risks that veterans and their colleagues are taking to fulfill the constitutional duty of the Postal Service. At least one veteran mail handler – Anthony Smith, an Army veteran – has already tragically passed away due to COVID-19.⁷

We stand ready to provide support to our veterans and the industries and services that they support. Veterans bring technical knowledge, professional skills, and patriotic attitudes that are invaluable in urgent crises like these. A whole-of-government approach includes supporting our veterans working on the frontlines, and all other essential employees who are working vigilantly during this public health crisis to ensure that every American has access to mailing services, no matter their ZIP code. We thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

⁴“Veterans unemployment up again”, Leo Shane III, *MilitaryTimes*, March 6, 2020.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/03/06/veterans-unemployment-up-again/>

⁵“If the US Postal Service fails, rural America will suffer the most”, Catherine Kim, *Vox*, April 16, 2020.

<https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/16/21219067/us-postal-service-shutting-down-rural-america-native-communities>

⁶“You’ve Got Less Mail: The Postal Service Is Suffering Amid The Coronavirus”, Brian Naylor, “All Things Considered”, *National Public Radio*, April 8, 2020.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/04/08/828949609/youve-got-less-mail-the-postal-service-is-suffering-amid-the-coronavirus>

⁷“Detroit mail handler dies from COVID-19”, Cassidy Johncox, *Click On Detroit*, April 5, 2020.

<https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2020/04/05/detroit-mail-handler-dies-from-covid-19/>

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator