

LIZZIE FLETCHER
7TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
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June 4, 2021

Tammy L. Whitcomb
Postmaster Inspector General
1735 N. Lynn Street
Arlington, VA 22209-2020

Dear Inspector General Whitcomb:

I write today to inquire about persistent mail service problems in Texas' Seventh Congressional District and to request a formal investigation into USPS Post Office Ashford West (12655 Whittington Dr, Houston, Texas 77077), USPS Post Office Westbury (11805 Chimney Rock Rd, Houston, Texas 77035), and the USPS Post Office Julius Melcher Station (2802 Timmons Lane, Houston, Texas 77027).

Since May 2019, constituents have contacted my office with reports of stolen and lost mail, mailboxes that have been broken into or need repairs to be functional, and washed checks. To date, we have received more than 100 complaints for these three post offices and five others. In one case, a check worth \$22,000 was stolen. While my staff has worked with local Consumer & Industry Contact Managers to attempt to solve these cases at an individual level, the continuation of these types of complaints are indicative of a larger problem with the mail system in Houston.

In 2016, your office issued an alert revealing that the North Houston Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC), where all mail in Houston stops on its way to its final destination, had the highest overall delayed mail volume in the country.¹ While your report at the time identified contributing factors and made recommendations to lessen delays, anecdotal evidence from my constituents and the result of your April 2021 audit of the facility reveal a continued problem with on-time delivery in the Houston area. In fact, your

¹ *Management Alert – Timeliness of Mail Processing at the North Houston, TX, Processing and Distribution Center (Report Number NO-MT-16-002)*, USPS Office of Inspector General (Feb. 29, 2016) (<https://www.uspsoidg.gov/document/management-alert-timeliness-mail-processing-north-houston-tx-processing-and-distribution>)

office found the North Houston P&DC reported the most delayed mail in the nation from January 1 to December 31, 2020.²

Although the first reports I received were in May 2019, there was a substantial increase in complaints in the second half of 2020. This is particularly concerning given our increased reliance on the USPS because of the coronavirus pandemic. Many of my constituents rely on the USPS for life-saving medications, stimulus checks, tax refunds, and correspondence with loved ones in this challenging and isolating time.

According to a local ABC-affiliate investigation, theft from drive-up boxes is also on the rise throughout my district.³ Local solutions have been to remove drive-up boxes entirely or close them until further notice, prompting customers to walk into the post office buildings to drop off their mail. During the coronavirus pandemic, these policies can disproportionately affect customers who are high-risk or differently abled and lessen their standard of service. The health and economic impacts of these problems on my constituents cannot be overstated.

I thank your office for the April 2021 audit of the North Houston P&DC to determine the cause of continued mail processing delays—mail arriving late from other mail processing facilities—and your recommendation to address that problem. Because of the many reports of theft and service issues at post offices throughout my district, however, I also ask you as the USPS Inspector General to:

1. Investigate how a copy of the master key to the Terraces on Memorial cluster mailbox (local Post Office: Ashford West) was made so that the new master key will not be replicated and mail will not be stolen in the future;
2. Investigate why mail continues to be lost at Ashford West, resulting in washed and stolen checks among other problems;
3. Investigate why mail continues to be lost at the Julius Melcher Station, resulting in washed and stolen checks among other problems;
4. Explain why the drive-up box and self-service kiosk at Westbury no longer work or have been removed, and detail possible remedies that maintain coronavirus safety protocols and access for the differently abled;
5. Ensure that the North Houston P&DC processes mail on its normal incoming sort plan in the future so that accurate numbers of delayed mail can be calculated, and problems can be identified in a timely manner; and
6. Plan a follow-up audit to ensure that your recent findings and these requests have been thoroughly addressed within two years.

Houstonians cannot wait for meaningful changes at the North Houston P&DC nor should they have to continue without remedy as mail is stolen and accessible services are removed. Thank

² Delayed Mail at the North Houston, TX, Processing and Distribution Center, USPS Office of Inspector General (April 13, 2021) (<https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-library-files/2021/21-074-R21.pdf>)

³ *Houston-area mailboxes shut down after checks get stolen*, ABC13 Eyewitness News (Feb. 1, 2021) (<https://abc13.com/mail-stolen-houston-texas-checks-cashed-theft-usps/10228502/>)

you for your commitment to the USPS's mission to provide reliable and affordable ways for the nation to connect, especially during this time. I recognize the sacrifice our postal workers make each day to deliver for us all and I look forward to hearing your response regarding these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lizzie Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "L".

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress