

WAITING ON THE MAIL: POSTAL SERVICE
STANDARD DROPS IN BALTIMORE AND THE
SURROUNDING AREA

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

FEBRUARY 14, 2022

Serial No. 117-65

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Reform



Available at: [govinfo.gov](https://www.govinfo.gov),
[oversight.house.gov](https://www.oversight.house.gov) or
[docs.house.gov](https://www.docs.house.gov)

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

46-904 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2022

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

CAROLYN B. MALONEY, New York, *Chairwoman*

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia	JAMES COMER, Kentucky, <i>Ranking Minority Member</i>
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts	JIM JORDAN, Ohio
JIM COOPER, Tennessee	VIRGINIA FOXX, North Carolina
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia	JODY B. HICE, Georgia
RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHY, Illinois	GLENN GROTHMAN, Wisconsin
JAMIE RASKIN, Maryland	MICHAEL CLOUD, Texas
RO KHANNA, California	BOB GIBBS, Ohio
KWEISI MFUME, Maryland	CLAY HIGGINS, Louisiana
ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ, New York	RALPH NORMAN, South Carolina
RASHIDA TLAIB, Michigan	PETE SESSIONS, Texas
KATIE PORTER, California	FRED KELLER, Pennsylvania
CORI BUSH, Missouri	ANDY BIGGS, Arizona
SHONTEL M. BROWN, Ohio	ANDREW CLYDE, Georgia
DANNY K. DAVIS, Illinois	NANCY MACE, South Carolina
DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Florida	SCOTT FRANKLIN, Florida
PETER WELCH, Vermont	JAKE LATURNER, Kansas
HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, Jr., Georgia	PAT FALLON, Texas
JOHN P. SARBANES, Maryland	YVETTE HERRELL, New Mexico
JACKIE SPEIER, California	BYRON DONALDS, Florida
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois	VACANCY
BRENDA L. LAWRENCE, Michigan	
MARK DESAULNIER, California	
JIMMY GOMEZ, California	
AYANNA PRESSLEY, Massachusetts	

RUSSELL ANELLO, *Staff Director*

WENDY GINSBERG, *Subcommittee on Government Operations Staff Director*

AMY STRATTON, *Deputy Chief Clerk*

CONTACT NUMBER: 202-225-5051

MARK MARIN, *Minority Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia, *Chairman*

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia	JODY B. HICE, Georgia <i>Ranking Minority Member</i>
DANNY K. DAVIS, Illinois	FRED KELLER, Pennsylvania
JOHN P. SARBANES, Maryland	ANDREW CLYDE, Georgia
BRENDA L. LAWRENCE, Michigan	ANDY BIGGS, Arizona
STEPHEN F. LYNCH, Massachusetts	NANCY MACE, South Carolina
JAMIE RASKIN, Maryland	JAKE LATURNER, Kansas
RO KHANNA, California	YVETTE HERRELL, New Mexico
KATIE PORTER, California	
SHONTEL M. BROWN, Ohio	

C O N T E N T S

Hearing held on February 14, 2022	Page 1
WITNESSES	
Mr. Eric Gilbert, Acting Executive Postmaster, Baltimore, U.S. Postal Service Oral Statement	18
Ms. Melinda Perez, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audit, Office of Inspector General, U.S. Postal Service Oral Statement	20
Ms. Rictarsha Westmoreland, Mail Processing Clerk and Shop Steward, U.S. Postal Service Oral Statement	21
Mr. Chuck Metzger, Controller, ReBUILD Metro Oral Statement	23
<i>Written opening statements and statements for the witnesses are available on the U.S. House of Representatives Document Repository at: docs.house.gov.</i>	

INDEX OF DOCUMENTS

- * Letter sent to Postmaster DeJoy; submitted by Rep. Ruppertsberger.
- * Questions for the Record: to Gilbert; submitted by Rep. Connolly.
- * Questions for the Record: to Perez; submitted by Rep. Connolly.
- * Questions for the Record: to Westmoreland; submitted by Rep. Connolly.

The documents are available at: docs.house.gov.

WAITING ON THE MAIL: POSTAL SERVICE STANDARD DROPS IN BALTIMORE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

Monday, February 14, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:02 a.m., in Baetjer Howard Moot Court Room, John and Frances Angelos Law Center, University of Baltimore, 1401 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD, and via Zoom; Hon. Gerald Connolly presiding.

Present: Representatives Connolly, Maloney, Norton, Davis, Sarbanes, Lawrence, Raskin, Khanna, Porter, Brown.

Also present: Representatives Hoyer, Mfume, Ruppertsberger, and Trone; and Senators Cardin and Van Hollen.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The subcommittee will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

I welcome everybody to the hearing here in Baltimore, which seeks to understand the mail delivery performance issues that plague this region.

Before I begin the opening statement, I want to ask unanimous consent that the following members shall be waived onto the subcommittee as participants for this hearing: the Honorable Steny Hoyer; the Honorable Kweisi Mfume; the Honorable Dutch Ruppersberger; the Honorable Anthony Brown; the Honorable David Trone; the U.S. Senator and Honorable Ben Cardin; and the U.S. Senator and Honorable Chris Van Hollen.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

We are here today in Baltimore, less than a week after the House's historic passage of the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022. That bill, of which I am an author and an original co-sponsor, will put the Postal Service on a path of financial solvency, unshackling the Postal Service from unfair statutory burdens that kept it mired in unnecessary payments for over a decade. The bill takes a pragmatic approach, planting the Postal Service on firm financial ground and readying it for the future.

The Postal Service is invaluable to this Nation. Throughout the pandemic, our Postal Service work force delivered prescription medications, paychecks, food stuffs, stimulus checks, holiday and birthday gifts, rapid COVID tests from the Biden Administration,

and more to homes and businesses across the Nation. A June 2020 Harris Poll found that the Postal Service ranked as the single most essential company to Americans during the pandemic.

The Postal Service employs 630,000 individuals spread throughout every single congressional district in the country. According to Pew Research, 91 percent of Americans have a favorable view of the Postal Service, making it the most popular Federal agency; in fact, I would argue making it the most popular thing on the planet.

A recent Inspector General report, however, found that the Postal Service has not always been meeting the needs of its customers. In fact, the Postal Service Office of Inspector General found that the Postal Service only met service performance targets for three of 33 products in Fiscal Year 2020.

Why are service performance targets important? Well, the Inspector General said that missing delivery goals could result in late fees and even a drop in credit ratings for consumers, as well as a disruption in cash-flow for businesses. I know one of our witnesses today that Mr. Mfume referred us to, Mr. Metzger, experienced these very late fees and incurred costs because of mail delays.

The Office of Inspector General added that late deliveries may drive mailers away from using the Postal Service, saying that once a consumer moves their bill payment online, they may be unlikely to go back to using the mail.

Simply put, missing service performance targets hurts those who rely on the Postal Service, and ultimately can diminish the hard-earned standing of this revered institution.

Despite the importance of meeting service performance targets, between October 2020 and January 2021, on-time delivery rates for First-Class Mail plummeted from 84 percent to 61 percent. Historically, the Postal Service, by way of comparison, achieves rates of between 90 and 93 percent, not 61 percent.

Fortunately, nationwide service performance has improved since, almost hitting those historically achieved rates. We should certainly recognize that progress, identifying the best practices that galvanized it so that the Postal Service can continue to serve the public. But it should also be noted that two key changes implemented by the Postal Service in the last Fiscal Year made these data rosier than reality.

First, though the Postal Service exceeded its Fiscal Year 2021 service performance target for First-Class Mail, that target was significantly reduced from the prior year, Fiscal Year 2020. In particular, the Postal Service reduced its Fiscal Year 2021 target for on-time delivery rates for First-Class Mail by more than 11 percent. So, it reduced the target, and then met it. That is not progress.

In addition, the Postal Service added an extra day or two to some First-Class Mail delivery standards, giving the Postal Service extra time to deliver the mail and still count it as on-time, even though from the customer's point of view it is two or three days later than it used to be. So, some of the improvements we see are likely attributable to new decreased service standards and not to actual improvements in the speed of mail delivery.

On this day after the Super Bowl, you might liken this to moving the goalposts so close that the kicker couldn't possibly miss the extra point.

Last October, we held a hearing in Chicago to investigate its deteriorating mail delivery performance. But as we said in that hearing, Chicago was not the worst in the Nation. That was Baltimore.

We are here in Baltimore today because this area was and remains among the hardest hit by substandard delivery. Baltimore's mail delivery has consistently underperformed the rest of the Nation.

We can put up the chart.

If you look at that screen, you will more clearly see why we are in Baltimore today. The figure shows quarter-by-quarter on-time delivery rates for every Postal district across the Nation. The top row is for First-Class Mail with a two-day service standard, and the bottom row is for First-Class Mail with a three-to-five-day service standard. Baltimore is in red, and the nationwide average is indicated by the dashed black line.

We need to know why, in the second quarter of 2021, Baltimore's on-time delivery rates dropped to 62 percent for two-day mail and 25 percent for three-to-five-day mail. That is around one in three pieces of mail arriving late for two-day mail, and 75 percent, three out of four that arrived late for three-to-five-day mail. I know my Maryland colleagues understandably find that to be unacceptable.

We should note that Baltimore's performance, alongside the rest of the Nation, has improved since last year's trough. But, as the graph shows, Baltimore has often underperformed the nationwide average since Fiscal Year 2012. We are talking about a decade's performance.

We are in Baltimore today to try to understand the root causes of that historic underperformance. By working together to address issues we uncover, we can ensure that the Postal Service delivers mail to Baltimore residents consistently and on-time.

We expect and demand more from our Postal Service. But to do that, we need leadership to provide it with the resources and staffing it requires to meet customer needs.

Instead, we have witnessed deteriorating service performance coupled with price hikes. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has made consequential and damaging operational changes at the Postal Service that affect postal delivery nationwide, and he has repeatedly done so without conducting the data analyses or customer engagements required to ensure that he is not causing further damage.

I am particularly concerned about the Postal Service's 10-year plan, which reduces service standards further and increases prices. That is a novel business model, lower standards and charge more for them. The Postal Regulatory Commission's advisory opinion of Mr. DeJoy's proposal to reduce delivery standards stated that it is not clear that the tradeoff between financial viability and maintaining high-quality service standards is reasonable.

According to the Postal Service Office of Inspector General, nine of Baltimore's busiest post offices had difficulty even grasping the scope of their own problems, if we can put that chart up. If you look at the screen again, you will see a table from a recent Inspec-

tor General report showing that nine Baltimore-area post offices undercounted delayed mail in their facilities by 771,640 pieces, a 79 percent undercount. So, as bad as the news has been, it is 79 percent understating it.

Data management did not only pose an issue in Baltimore's delivery units, but also in its processing and distribution center, which processes mail pieces and distributes them to local post offices. Another related Inspector General report notes that employees were not performing container load scans and depart scans consistently before dispatching mail to the next facility. Without accurate and complete data, management cannot make informed operational decisions, and so it is left guessing the steps they need to take to improve mail delivery for postal customers.

The Inspector General also found that key features of the processing and distribution center slowed down employees, leading to increased delays in mail delivery. For example, the facility's tray management system, which transports trays of letters within the facility and significantly reduces transport time, has been inoperable since March 2019, three years. According to the OIG report, the absence of those tray management systems has added two hours per day to each operation to move the mail. That is two hours each day for three years. The tray management system was supposed to be replaced last month. I hope we can get an update today.

In short, mismanagement of Baltimore postal facilities has unnecessarily contributed to delays in mail delivery relative to the rest of the Nation.

Today we have witnesses who can help us diagnose those problems, and we have witnesses who need to be part of designing and implementing solutions to those problems.

We need to hold Postal Service leadership to account. We need to see written plans that are responsive to the analysis and recommendations of the Postal Service Inspector General. And we need to strive to reach delivery rates that meet the demands of the Postal Service's customers, reviving the Postal Service instead of driving it into decline, especially during a pandemic.

We are going to work together as colleagues to solve these problems and to hopefully change the governance of the Postal Service to ensure we have a Board of Governors and a Postmaster General who understand the essential function of the Postal Service during a pandemic and who are dedicated to the Postal Service mission to deliver mail and packages in a timely and efficient basis to every American household and every American business, every day.

Thank you.

Do we have a Republican? The gentleman does not wish to give an opening statement.

Mr. Hoyer, are you with us? Yes, you are.

The Chair recognizes the distinguished Majority Leader of the House of Representatives, Mr. Hoyer, for any opening remarks.

Mr. HOYER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thanks for holding this hearing in Baltimore. I know that Mr. Sarbanes and Mr. Ruppersberger appreciate your looking at this vital issue, and I want you to know that I recently sent a letter—today, as a matter of fact—to the Postmaster General to ask him questions

about the region that I represent in southern Maryland. But, of course, I am concerned about the delivery of the mail throughout not only our state but, as a former Chairman of the Treasury Postal Committee on the Appropriations Committee, I had numerous hearings about performance of a service vital to the American people.

So, thank you very much for holding this hearing.

Also, I see Carolyn Maloney, the Chair of the full committee, is on with us, and this is going to be looking at things that aren't going as well as they should have. However, last week we were able to pass historic legislation with the leadership of the Chair of the full committee and yourself, Mr. Chairman, and I congratulate the entire committee. And it was an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote in sending a bill to the Senate, and I expect the Senate to start to seize on it and hopefully pass it this week to get the Postal Service on a sound fiscal standing so that they can proceed with the reforms that your committee, that you have just discussed, and I know your committee and Chairwoman of the committee will highlight and help us reach the reforms that we need.

I appreciate this opportunity to participate with you, and I have written of my concerns, and I will speak briefly to concerns raised by several my constituents in the 5th congressional District.

Postal delays have denied many, unfortunately, of my constituents of the ability to pay bills on time despite mailing their payments early. This is unacceptable, Mr. Chairman. These delays resulted in Marylanders receiving Failure to Pay notices and subsequently risking utility shutoffs.

Several constituents reported that their pension applications were unable to be processed by USPS employees at multiple locations in southern Maryland. One person contacted me after a USPS truck hit a personal vehicle on the street and would not pull over or stop at all. That is not the Postal Service at large, but it is a problem that needs to be addressed in a very fulsome and effective way.

These issues are indicative of the national decline in the Postal Service performance, and particularly egregious failures in Baltimore and throughout Maryland. This is a serious national problem. America cannot function without a USPS that works.

Now, let me say tangentially, the Postal Service delivers hundreds of millions of pieces of mail, about 159 million, every day. Even with a one percent mistake level, which all of us would like to replicate ourselves, that is a huge number of people who are being not served as well as we need them served.

Across America, postal delays threaten the health of seniors and those with preexisting conditions who depend on the Postal Service to deliver their prescription drugs reliably.

Last week, as I have said, the House overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan Postal Service Reform Act with a resounding 342 to 92 vote. Congratulations, Madam Chair, and all of you who worked on that Postal Reform bill. It is needed, necessary, and is decades in the making. It had the support of Democrats, Republicans, the Postal Union, the USCS leadership, which worked constructively to make this bill possible. I want to thank Superintendent DeJoy for the work that he did. Obviously, Mr. Chairman, you have raised

issues that I share with respect to systemic changes that have been made which have undermined the Postal Service's ability to perform its job in the way that we expect. The legislation, however, that we did pass will result in better pay and benefits for USPS workers and, importantly for the American people, ensure six-day delivery.

Unfortunately, though, it will not address the significant service problems that plague Maryland and other states in the near term. I remain concerned about the Postal Service's policies that have been recently adopted to which you referred, Mr. Chairman, the effect of which is the destruction of mail and delivery services.

We in Congress are committed to making sure that the Postal Service has the resources to address its issues with delays and reliability.

As I said, I recently sent a letter to Postmaster General DeJoy to express my deep concerns and urged him to rectify the issues I have been hearing about from my constituency. I know my colleagues in Maryland have done the same. I hope he will sit down with the stakeholders directly to discuss these issues and discuss ways to address them meaningfully.

There is a critical need for increased transparency and accountability, starting from the very top, to ensure that Americans can send and receive their mail on time. Even in our age of digital communications, Mr. Chairman, Americans still rely on the Postal Service for essential services, and we must ensure its dependability.

I appreciate the subcommittee being here in Maryland today to focus in particular on the issues here in our state, and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses, who I hope will speak to these challenges and how they can be addressed.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your leadership. Carolyn, thank you for your leadership, as well. And I say to my dear colleague from Washington, DC, the state of Frederick Douglas, on the screen with us as well, thank you very much for your leadership and participation in this hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Hoyer. Thank you and all of the Maryland delegation for this extraordinary attendance today, which I just think underscores the commitment each and every one of the members representing this great state of Maryland have with respect to this issue and the desire to highlight problems, but also find solutions. We really appreciate that participation today, especially with our two U.S. senators, as well. In Chicago, we had one U.S. senator, but not two.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CONNOLLY. At any rate, the Chair wants to recognize the distinguished Chair of the full committee, who is the first chair since 2006 to actually get a Postal reform bill not only on the floor but passed with an overwhelming bipartisan vote. Great credit goes to our Chairwoman, Carolyn Maloney, who is recognized for her opening statement.

Chairwoman Maloney. Thank you so much, Chairman Connolly, and all of my colleagues who are on. I see Danny Davis, a former Postal employee, who speaks so beautifully about ways to help the

Post Office, and Eleanor Holmes Norton, and the entire Maryland delegation, our senators, our representatives, and a special thank you to Steny Hoyer, who was the quarterback on passing this bill, always there to help, always there to push. It was difficult. Thank you, Steny, so much for your leadership on this and so many other things.

As we all know well, the Postal Service is one of our Nation's most vital and respected institutions. It is so important that our Founders included it in the Constitution, up front, under Article I. So it is fair to say that the Postal Service is woven into every fabric of our country.

It provides service across the country to every single address, from rural farms to urban skyscrapers, and it adds over a million new deliveries every year.

It really binds our Nation together in a way that no other organization does.

Unfortunately, its service performance has suffered in the last two years.

Part of the challenge has been caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. Postal employees, who are on the front lines, have been hit especially hard with sickness caused by COVID-19.

The Postal Service's recent positive performance in its 2021 peak period indicates that it is indeed capable of getting mail delivered on time.

But performance in certain areas of the country, and particularly in Baltimore, remains far below acceptable levels.

It is critical that the Postal Service address this poor performance as soon as possible to ensure that Baltimore residents receive reliable, on-time delivery of critical mail, medications, and other critical resources.

To help the Postal Service achieve this goal, the House just passed my legislation to put the Postal Service on a more sustainable financial footing. It was very strongly bipartisan. We had over 120 Republicans join us. I want to give a shout-out to Representative Comer for his leadership on the Republican side.

With these reforms, the Postal Service will have the resources it needs to ensure exceptional performance for all Americans regardless of whether they live in cities or in rural areas. And it will bring back to the Postal Service over \$50 billion in 10 years, and it will save taxpayers money, over \$1.5 billion, in 10 years.

It also brings reforms on delivery where you will have a real live Internet portal where you can check the delivery by zip code so that Postal workers and community activists can work to improve the Postal delivery in your area. And it will allow them to contract with cities and states and tribes and counties to provide services, like permits to go fishing or hunting, other types of permits that will allow them to gain revenue, and it has many other improvements.

But with this, I look forward to the hearing. I want to thank Chairman Connolly for holding this incredibly important hearing and yield back the balance of my time. Thank you so much.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the distinguished Chairwoman and thank her for her leadership and commitment to this issue.

The Chair now recognizes the distinguished senior senator from the state of Maryland, our friend, Ben Cardin, Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, and thank you very much for holding this hearing. Specifically, thank you for coming to Baltimore. We are at the University of Maryland, University of Baltimore Law School. We welcome you here, President Schmoke. We are proud of this institution, and we are very proud that you have come here to Baltimore because of this issue. And Chairwoman Maloney, we thank her also for her leadership on this committee.

As you noted, we have the entire Baltimore City Federal delegation present at this hearing, telling you a little bit about how important this matter is to our constituents and to our community. I want to thank Senator Van Hollen for his leadership and our House delegation. Congressman Ruppertsberger has been taking the lead on this, Congressman Mfume, Congressman Sarbanes. We have all been engaged on this issue.

It is Valentine's Day. I will be checking tonight when I get home to see if I got my valentines or not. I have a lot of secretive admirers, so I hope my mailbox will be full. But I am concerned as to whether that mail will be there or not.

And I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses. Mr. Gilbert, our Acting Executive Postmaster, we thank you for being here; Ms. Perez from the Inspector General's Office; and I believe we will be hearing from Ms. Westmoreland representing Local 181.

I want to start by saying the obvious. We respond to constituent concerns, and we have had a record number of constituents upset and worried because of the Postal Service not being up to its expected level. I could give you many, many examples.

St. Luke's Place, a senior housing in Baltimore County, we have heard numerous complaints of not getting their medicines on time, jeopardizing their health, not getting their checks on time, compromising their financial ability, having the bills that they paid that they thought would be on time not arriving on time. These are common complaints that we are getting routinely in our office.

But I don't even have to go to my constituents who are contacting me through our case workers. I can just go to my own example at home. Recently I have had to pay two finance charges on credit cards because the check was not received on time by the credit card company. So, what did I do? I found alternative ways now to pay my credit card bills because I can't rely—and I put it in the mail weeks in advance of the due date, and it still didn't get there on time.

So, that is just causing additional problems for the Postal Service because you are losing customers, and it just feeds on the challenges that we have.

So, the Maryland delegation wrote a letter to the Postmaster months ago outlining these problems. And as has been pointed out, these problems have existed for some time. We recognize that the Coronavirus has made it more challenging; we recognize that. But these problems didn't just occur from the Coronavirus. They have been here for a substantial period of time.

So we brought this to the attention of the leadership, and we still don't have the results that we need. So, we have done our own in-

vestigations. There have been some reports issued. Our equipment is not what it needs to be in Baltimore. You haven't made those investments even though we have asked for it. The facilities are not what is necessary in order to reach the level that is—we are not getting the resources, and we are not getting the managerial concern and leadership that we need in order to get the level up to what is acceptable. It is not acceptable today, and it has to change, and it has to change quickly.

I want just to acknowledge that the dedicated people who work at the Postal Service, working under extremely challenging circumstances, it is not their issue why we don't have the service that we need. They are working as hard as they possibly can. They have asked for even additional ways in which they could accommodate the challenges that are there and that have had a resistance from the leadership of the Postal Service.

So, this is unacceptable, and I very much look forward to these conversations today. But it must change, and it must change quickly.

Now, Mr. Chairman, on a positive note, Senator Van Hollen and I will be leaving to go to Washington tonight to vote on a cloture motion so that we can take up the Postal Service bill that passed the House. We do hope we can pass it as early as this week because we recognize there are systemic challenges in the Postal system in the way that you have to pre-fund your health care, in the way that your workers are not integrated into the Medicare system. All of that needs to be corrected, and the House bill does that and will be strongly supported, I am convinced, by the Senate. We hope to get that to the President.

That will help. But we need to have the commitment that you are going to make the changes in Baltimore, in Maryland, in this Nation so that the Postal Service can once again have the confidence of the people of this Nation as to what it historically has done.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you again. I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Senator. Hopefully, this hearing can be an inspiration for your colleagues to vote for that cloture motion. Thank you so much for being with us.

The Chair is so pleased to recognize his friend and former colleague, not only in the House but in the Senate, on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Mr. Van Hollen and I were young staffers on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he went on to great things, and I am still pawing away.

Senator Van Hollen is recognized for an opening statement.

Welcome, Chris.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. I want to start by thanking Chairman Connolly, Gerry Connolly, for holding this hearing and bringing it to Baltimore. And thank you for the great work that you and your colleagues in the House have done in passing that Postal reform legislation. We do hope to take that up quickly and pass it in the Senate.

It is really good to be here with my colleagues, Senator Cardin, Congressman Ruppertsberger, Congressman Mfume, Congressman Sarbanes.

This has been an issue we have been focused on, and I believe this hearing will further get to the bottom of the challenges that we face.

Last July I chaired a hearing in the Senate Appropriations subcommittee, and we heard from Maryland Postal customers struggling with delays and all the hardships that imposed. We heard from a Maryland Postal worker who described how he and his colleagues do their very best to deliver the mail under very tough circumstances and under very big management challenges. And we heard from the USPS Inspector General, who confirmed that the disruptive changes instituted by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy in the summer of 2020 had made things much worse. Things were challenging because of the pandemic, but the changes that Postmaster DeJoy put in place made it much worse.

I have called for his removal, and I believe he still needs to be replaced.

But while that brought down the level of service nationwide, Mr. Chairman, as you indicated, things have improved, but the goalposts have also been moved. They have improved here in Maryland and in Baltimore, but as you pointed out with your charts, Baltimore remains the hot spot in the country in terms of poor mail service delivery, and you have already gone through the figures, so I will not repeat those.

The good news is that the Inspector General has made recommendations to fix the problems that the Postal Service is beginning to adopt, and service in Baltimore is improving as a result. Later today I will begin going through those in detail during some of the question period to determine what has been done, what remains to be done, and how we can improve mail service, because at the end of the day, that is our goal. Our goal is to make sure, by spotlighting the problem, we fix the problem. And I appreciate, Mr. Chairman, you coming here so that we can do that in an urgent way.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen. Thank you so much for your commitment and leadership, as well. We wish you good luck in the cloture vote tonight.

Mr. MFUME is recognized for an opening statement. Welcome.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for being here in Baltimore. But more importantly, thank you for the leadership that you have provided year after year, and for those of us who look to you for guidance on so many of these issues.

I also want to thank Senator Cardin and Senator Van Hollen, both of whom made a commitment to be here and are here, and I appreciate their work on these issues. I am hoping, like you, that cloture does take place in the Senate tonight and that this reform bill that so many of us have sponsored does, in fact, become law.

My thanks to Majority Leader Hoyer, the member on the other side, Mr. Boggs, and all my Maryland colleagues who, as you have noted, are here. Congressmen Ruppertsberger, Sarbanes, Raskin, Trone, Brown are part of this because they are part of what we like to consider Team Maryland. This is an issue that affects all of us in Maryland, obviously, but also people all across this country.

So, I thank you for coming here to Maryland's 7th congressional District to convene this. I am appreciative of your diligence and

your commitment in addressing Postal delays. None of those are any more important in my mind right now than the delays in Baltimore, where we have, regrettably, seen and documented the worst problems, the worst slowdowns, the worst imaginable things in terms of the Postal Service. So, I am happy that you are here.

For 250 years, going back to the days of Ben Franklin, who was the first Postmaster, Americans have relied on the Postal Service for prompt and affordable mail that comes on time. Yet, for the last two years, my congressional office, like so many of yours, has seen complaint after complaint from constituents, one after another, who have not received their medicines, who have not received their bills on time, who have not received their checks, not even received First Class packages on time, and have ended up, as Senator Cardin said, paying late fees for something they were never late about.

In the last two years my congressional office has fielded hundreds of complaints from constituents that really want and deserve a better way.

Missing mail delivery and delivery slowdowns have unfortunately become a part of everyday life across the country, and more so here in Baltimore. According to the U.S. Postal Service's audit that I and Congressman Ruppersberger requested, Baltimore did not meet its own service targets for First Class Mail, for Priority Mail, for periodical mail, and for marketing mail, and that went on for a 92-week period, beginning October 4 of 2019 through July 2 of last year. And most recently, in the fourth quarter of last year, Baltimore experienced delayed mail almost 20 percent of the time.

So, the Inspector General's audit that I requested and the additional audit that came after that confirmed the national post office and its leadership has failed the American people, and even more so the people of Baltimore.

As I have said many times as a member of this committee, Mr. Chairman, change must start at the top, and I am so happy that the Chair of the full committee, Mrs. Maloney, has joined us and is a part of this. Her leadership, and that coupled with yours, has got us to a point where we are actually seeing some changes.

President Biden heeded the call of many of us to replace Ron Bloom from his seat. And as I said for almost two years, since July 2020, Postmaster DeJoy has to step down. He has got to go. He has repeatedly thumbed his nose at every attempt to try to bring about a process to show him the error of his ways. He has disassembled sorting machines in post offices all over this country. He has removed mailboxes without the proper audits required for mailboxes to be removed from communities, and he has denied overtime repeatedly from Postal workers who, as has been said earlier, really provided the backbone through this crisis to make sure we got mail delivery.

Now, I just want to do, if I might, Mr. Chairman, one quick thing, and that is to say that we have all seen where the Postal Service has over 230,000 vehicles. And now, after deliberately putting in place a program and process to slow down the mail, deliberately he did this, now he is refusing to purchase electric vehicles for the post office, the aging fleet of vehicles that have to be replaced. Mr. DeJoy wants to buy 116,000 gasoline trucks instead of

doing what he ought to do, what the EPA, the President's Council on the Environment and everybody has said, and that is to find a way now to move to electric vehicles.

So, I can't say much more than that except to say that Mr. DeJoy, if you are listening, we feel strongly about this. We are not going to stop until you are removed from your position and the American people will have some semblance of quality, affordability, and prompt service once again.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Mfume.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER is recognized for any opening remarks.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Thank you, Chairman. I want to acknowledge the chairman of the whole committee, Carolyn Maloney.

Chairman Connolly, you have done a great job in leadership on this issue. You spent time and thank you for coming to my hometown and the members of this table's hometown to deal with this issue. It is very serious; it is un-American. We know the positive history of the post office.

I also want to acknowledge our congressional team. You don't want to mess with our congressional team when we come together. Our two senators, you have Senator Cardin, Senator Van Hollen, and then the Baltimore people, where the real problem is. I want to thank Kweisi Mfume and John Sarbanes. We work as a team, and we are not stopping until our constituents are properly served by one of the most outstanding organizations in the United States of America, and history shows that.

I also want to acknowledge the leadership of Steny Hoyer, who is constantly here working with us on all of these issues.

In my over 19 years in Congress—I really can't believe I have been here that long—I have never received complaints of this magnitude about the mail. Many of my constituents have gone weeks without receiving their mail, including paychecks and life-saving prescriptions.

Mail problems are a challenge for Members of Congress because we lack jurisdiction. The United States Post Office is an independent agency that falls under the Executive branch and does not receive tax dollars. So, we have had to get creative.

I have written to Postmaster General DeJoy and requested meetings on numerous occasions. He has never, not once, responded. I have been meeting regularly with the local leadership, including Postmaster Gilbert, who you will hear from today. Thank you for being here.

I have demanded solutions at press conferences.

Finally, Congressmen Sarbanes, Mfume and myself, we requested the United States Post Office Inspector General, who oversees the Post Office independent of the everyday operations of the Post Office, step in and audit the most problematic post office in my district and in the country.

You know, it is good to be first when it is something good. But for the Baltimore region to be No. 1, the worst mail delivery in the country, that is wrong, we can't allow it, and we are going to do whatever we can on behalf of our constituents to change that and to turn it around.

I again thank you for the hearing, Mr. Connolly.

When the audits came in, the results were unsurprising. We knew how serious this issue was. The Baltimore region has the second highest number of missing mail inquiries in the country. Many product categories never met their service target during the three-month audit period. Forty-two percent of packages were improperly scanned. It is just mind-boggling what happened here in the Baltimore region. Baltimore, again, the worst in the country. That just blows my mind, and we are going to turn it around, and we are trying.

Now, while worsened by the pandemic, post office issues were clearly deteriorating before COVID. We heard today, I think Chairman Connolly said the issues really started to deteriorate in 2013, even before DeJoy came into leadership. They are the result of poor planning and oversight by Postmaster General DeJoy and senior Postal leadership, who have unilaterally rolled out the “Delivering for America” plan despite widespread concerns. The plan has lowered service standards and increased prices. And while headquarters gave themselves unprecedented raises and bonuses, this issue keeps moving forward without regard to the great people who work in the post office now and in all those years. The poor management has really hurt the system here, and we want to thank those employees who have stayed the course, and we are behind you.

Now, I ask for unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter I sent last week to Postmaster General DeJoy further outlining my concerns.[EO2]

Mr. CONNOLLY. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. I am eager to work with this committee to put the post office back on a sustainable path and restore mail service to the level our constituents deserve.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Ruppertsberger.

The Chair now recognizes the distinguished Congresswoman from the District of Columbia for any opening remarks she may wish to share, Ms. Norton.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Connolly, let me say how much I appreciate your giving me an opportunity to give an opening statement at this very important field hearing on ongoing issues with the United States Postal Service.

Mr. Chairman, these problems are nationwide. While this hearing is focused on the delivery issues in the Baltimore area, not far from my own District of Columbia district, I would be remiss if I did not mention that my district, the District of Columbia, is facing similar problems with delivery as well. D.C. residents have been contacting my office in record numbers about the rate of undelivered mail. I have had to write the Postal Service regularly about delayed, undelivered mail in every part of the district. The situation is simply untenable.

That is why this hearing is so important. We need answers. Changes need to be made to the Postal Service as quickly as possible.

I strongly support the mission of the Postal Service. It is a vital government institution. I also have great respect for our dedicated Postal workers. The delivery issues are not their fault.

While the Coronavirus pandemic has certainly affected the Postal Service and its work force, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy deserves much, if not most, of the blame for the delivery issues.

I again reiterate my call and that of members who preceded me for Postmaster General DeJoy to be removed or resign.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Ms. Norton, and thank you for your consistent support to reform and improve Postal services for your constituents and all our constituents.

The Chair now recognizes the distinguished gentleman from Chicago, Illinois, the Honorable Mr. Davis, for any opening remarks he may wish.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The only thing I would need to do and say is to thank you and commend you, Chairwoman Maloney, and the members of this committee, and all those people from Maryland.

You know, you have two United States senators there and we only had one. The other one couldn't be present. And you have Steny Hoyer. He couldn't be in Chicago either.

But let me just associate myself with the remarks. I wish my people from Chicago could hear these remarks so that they know Chicago is not the only one. I concur with all those who have called for the resignation of the head of the Postal Service because it has a noble mandate, it has a great history of being revered by citizens throughout the country, and we don't want that mandate, nor do we want that history, to be reversed. It needs new leadership.

Commendations again to you, to Congresswoman and our leader, Carolyn Maloney, for the tremendous leadership you have provided on this issue. I thank you and yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Davis.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Sarbanes, is recognized for any opening remarks.

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you and the subcommittee for coming to Baltimore today to discuss the reasons for the longstanding mail delivery issues. I want to thank the University of Baltimore for hosting us.

For years, as we have heard, Baltimore has ranked at the bottom of the country in terms of on-time delivery of mail and lost mail, metrics that pose significant hardships for many mailers who rely on this Federal agency to pay their bills, receive their medications, and even vote.

I have received, as others have, countless messages from my constituents detailing how Postal Service delays have impacted their daily lives, and I want to share just one of those right now.

On May 10, 2021, one of my constituents from Pikesville mailed her passport and marriage license to the Towson Social Security office, just about 10 miles away, to obtain a name change. On May 13, the office mailed them back. However, the documents were not received until August 7, nearly three months later. Despite repeated efforts to seek assistance from the USPS's online complaint

system, the documents only appeared after my office was able to intervene.

Imagine that some of your most sensitive personal documents missing for months without any way of knowing where they might be or if they are gone forever. And she is not alone. Many others have experienced similar situations, in some cases even seeing their credit scores drop because of a late or never-arriving bill.

Marylanders deserve better, and I am confident that we can do better. Just last week, as you said, the House passed the Postal Service Reform Act to make critical improvements to the financial stability, operational efficiency, and the transparency of the Postal Service. The bill will not only save the Postal Service billions of dollars, thereby ensuring it has the resources necessary to strengthen its staffing, equipment, and commitments to the American people for decades to come, but will also impose additional oversight, critically, and accountability measures to help us better hold the agency to the high standards we know its dedicated public servants are capable of.

I want to thank you, Chairman Connolly, for your work on this bill. I encourage my colleagues in the Senate to vote for its passage this week; we have high confidence there.

I look forward to hearing more today about how we in Baltimore and in Congress can work together to ensure the efficient implementation of this bill and markedly improved Postal delivery here in Maryland.

Mr. Chairman, the U.S. Postal Service is a treasured institution. When the letter you are waiting for shows up in your mailbox on time, it makes you feel good. It makes you feel like things are working. That is what this is all about.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Sarbanes, and thank you for the specific example you gave us because it is important to remember that this is not a problem in the abstract. This is a very practical problem, during a pandemic particularly, where the Postal Service is a lifeline for people, and it can be profoundly disruptive at a very difficult time to begin with. Thank you, Mr. Sarbanes.

Our colleague, a former employee of the Postal Service itself, so she knows where all the bodies are buried, and a leader in Postal reform on our committee and in the Congress, the gentle lady from Michigan, Ms. Lawrence, is recognized for any opening remarks she may have. Welcome.

Ms. LAWRENCE. Thank you so much, Chairman Connolly. I just want to thank you for your leadership, and to the Chair of our committee, Representative Maloney, for all your commitment to this issue.

As a 30-year veteran of the Postal Service, conducting oversight and fighting for its long-term solvency, it is especially important to me. I want you all to know that the last few years have truly demonstrated the importance of the Postal Service's mission, and that is providing prompt and reliable mail delivery.

Throughout the pandemic, Americans relied on the Postal Service to deliver essential medical supplies, economic impact payments, and many more. When we talk about mental health in

America, a simple thing like a greeting card from someone you love arriving in a timely manner can make a difference.

Due to employee availability, regions of the country, including Baltimore, and my district in southeast Michigan, experienced widespread delivery delays. Last week, in a strong bipartisan vote, the House of Representatives approved the Postal Service Reform Act to demonstrate our commitment to the agency's long-term financial viability.

I want everyone here to know that when I say this is personal, it truly is. I was a letter carrier when I first started. I know what it means to walk in cold, rain, sleet and snow. I sorted mail. I know what it means to disrupt your family routine so that you can work. The people and the workers of the Postal Service are committed. We need the leadership of the Postal Service to step up and take accountability for what is happening; but more importantly, to make the investments in the Postal Service so that it will continue to be the one Federal agency that gets the highest ranking of approval and not let the American people down.

As the most favorable government agency, we must ensure that the Postal Service is positioned to deliver the mail in a prompt and reliable manner. We are seeing the numbers in the pandemic get better across the country. We expect the challenges that the Postal Service had during one of its most critical times in America to improve as well.

I want everyone here to know that I came here to the Congress pledging to invest in the Postal Service and to stabilize them financially. I have delivered that package, and I expect for the Postal Service to continue to deliver to the people of America.

Thank you so much, and I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Congresswoman Lawrence.

The gentleman from Tacoma Park, Maryland, Mr. Raskin, is recognized for any opening remarks he may have.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your great leadership on all of the Postal issues we are dealing with; and thank you, Ms. Maloney; and to my Baltimore colleagues for hosting this really important hearing.

My constituents, too, have seen significant delays in mail delivery and a sharp decline in service performance in recent years, but the speed of performance is only part of the problem. The most common complaints I am getting are about mis-delivered mail, hospital bills, paychecks, medicines, tax documents, all gone to the wrong address, which means the neighbors essentially have to deliver mail to each other, if they can do it. That is obviously not a sustainable model for us getting mail to people.

There is also the problem of missing mail, time-sensitive documents like contracts, bills, personal correspondence, that simply is never delivered at all and just vanishes into a Kafkaesque Postal void.

And then this morning, just 20 minutes before we met, I spoke to two treasured constituents and friends in Bethesda who had a check to their credit card company of \$4,987 stolen out of their mailbox and then copied, with all kinds of nightmarish implications in terms of having to try to scramble to deal with that problem, and I don't know to what extent we have an efficient system for

dealing with the increasing problem of mail theft, which is something I want to ask about today.

So, whether it is my constituents in Westminster who aren't getting mail for three or four days in a row, or constituents in Kensington or Silver Spring whose forwarding orders are not being properly honored, whatever it is, we need to clean up the system and make sure it works right. This is a leadership and management challenge, as Ms. Lawrence said. It goes to the top levels of the Postal Service, and we need to see rapid change and improvement so that this American jewel of the Postal Service continues to shine in service throughout this century.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Raskin, and thank you for all you do on this and so many other issues that matter to Americans.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Trone, is recognized for his opening statement.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, and to the subcommittee staff, for holding this important hearing. And thanks to Chairwoman Maloney for her leadership on this issue and so many other issues.

We all know the United States Postal Service is a pillar of American society, and the timely delivery of mail is critical to lives and livelihoods of countless Americans, especially in regions like in my district in western Maryland with little or no broadband.

According to the September 2021 Office of the Inspector General's report on the nationwide service performance during the 18 months observed, the amount of mail and parcels delivered on time decreased in every single mail classification. This is particularly true of the Baltimore region, among the worst if not the worst in the country when it comes to delivering First-Class Mail. While we understand COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges, at the end of the day this is a leadership failure, leadership.

Postmaster DeJoy must be removed. As our late friend, Congressman Cummings, says, we are better than that, we are so much better, and he has to go.

Millions of Americans, including some of the most vulnerable, rely on the Postal Service for their medications, Social Security checks, tax refunds, and so much more. In my district, in that most rural part of western Maryland, that lack of broadband means many folks still pay their bills by mail. And in small towns without pharmacies, the Postal Service is the only way to get a prescription filled. We can't afford to let delays interfere with the delivery of these vital services. We owe it to the American people to get it right.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on Team Maryland and across the country to ensure the Postal Service takes the necessary steps to correct this course and serve the American people in a timely and effective manner.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Trone. Thank you for your tenacity and your steadfast commitment to improving the Postal Service and the quality of life for all of our constituents.

That concludes opening remarks, believe it or not.

We have four witnesses today. Let me introduce them, and then I will ask them to stand and/or raise their right hand for being sworn in.

Our first witness today will be Eric Gilbert, who is the Acting Baltimore Postmaster for the U.S. Postal Service here in Baltimore.

Then we will hear from Melinda Perez, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audit for the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

Then we will hear from Rictarsha Westmoreland, Mail Processing Clerk at the incoming mail facility in Linthicum, Maryland, and Shop Steward for the American Postal Workers Union.

And finally, we will hear from Chuck Metzger, Controller of Re-BUILD Metro, a non-profit organization located here in Baltimore in Mr. Mfume's 7th District that works with community members to revitalize homes and neighborhoods without displacing existing residents, and he will tell his story.

The two remote witnesses will be unmuted so that we can swear everybody in.

If you would rise, and if our two remote witnesses would raise their right hand along with our in-person witnesses. You got it? OK. Thank you.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. CONNOLLY. Let the record show that our witnesses answered in the affirmative. Thank you.

Without objection, your written statements will be made a part of the record.

Mr. Gilbert, you are recognized for your opening remarks. Welcome.

**STATEMENT OF ERIC GILBERT, ACTING EXECUTIVE
POSTMASTER, BALTIMORE, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE**

Mr. GILBERT. Good morning, Chairman Connolly, subcommittee members, and the Maryland delegation. Thank you for calling this important hearing to examine service performance in Baltimore. My name is Eric Gilbert. I have served as an Acting Executive Postmaster of Baltimore since October. My Postal career began 26 years ago as a mail processing clerk in San Diego, and I have held several leadership positions since. I acted in the same assignment in 2020 and since returning have put processes in place to improve service performance.

Overall, the main factors impacting Baltimore's service performance are related to employee availability and training. Currently, we have 102 clerk and carrier vacancies, and pandemic-related absences and other availability issues also affect our ability to maintain service excellence.

On the pandemic front, attendance has improved since the expiration of legislative leave, but availability remains fluid due to changing COVID variants. On a daily basis, our district management holds calls to discuss key metrics and develop plans to move resources where needed. On a weekly basis I review staffing and, when necessary, seek assistance from surrounding areas to ensure service. During these reviews, we work to determine the root cause of any unusually high employee absences.

Beyond addressing immediate absences, we are concentrating on recruitment. Our ability to hire new employees was in fact hampered by delays in removing departed employees from our rolls. I now hold weekly calls with district management and my own team to discuss removals and approve staffing at the individual unit level.

On hiring itself, we have expedited the process by automating the posting of vacancies once hired. We move to address limitations in training by opening a new Carrier City Training Academy, increasing the number of new hires we can train from seven to 32 each week.

I also engage in a recruitment campaign to increase the number of certified, on-the-job instructors, and I have taken steps to ensure that the employees waiting for efficient training are provided modified training on processes such as sorting and scanning.

On retention, we do have trouble retaining carriers in Baltimore. Many leave the job after realizing it is much more physically demanding than anticipated. To address this, we conduct one-on-one interviews with those employees about factors that led them to leave and what changes would encourage them to stay.

Hiring and recruiting is also difficult for high-crime areas, and when we place new hires in those units, they often resign.

On the operational front, to improve efficiencies such as lack of scanning, weekly training is provided to all supervisory employees who in turn train carriers and clerks. I monitor all available reporting tools daily and take necessary action to correct.

All of these efforts are aimed at improving our performance, and we are seeing improvement. A case in point: In 2021, peak holiday mailing season, to prepare for a successful peak, we hired 267 employees in Baltimore between October and December. The Maryland district leased additional space for package sorting annexes and added six package sorting machines to increase processing capacity. We established five added delivery annexes in Baltimore and moved package volume to those sites to be run separately from normal delivery operations.

These annexes allowed us to provide more consistent delivery by alleviating space constraints in our regular delivery units, improving package sortation, and providing more flexibility.

We also conducted early morning package delivery runs from Baltimore units to ensure timely delivery and early carrier return. We delivered nearly 2.5 million packages in Baltimore from November 28 through December 24.

Our overall performance data demonstrates that service has stabilized across all product areas, though it declined slightly in early December and January due to COVID-related absences and winter weather. It has since rebounded.

Please note that I am committed to providing high-quality, reliable service to Baltimore City residents. We have seen steady service performance improvement as a result of the processes we have established, and we will refine these processes as any new challenges arise.

Thank you, Chairman Connolly and members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to address these matters. I welcome any questions that you may have.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Gilbert.

Ms. Perez, you are recognized for your opening summary.

STATEMENT OF MELINDA PEREZ, DEPUTY ASSISTANT INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AUDIT, OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Ms. PEREZ. Can you hear me OK? Thank you.

Good morning, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, members of the subcommittee, and the Maryland delegation. Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss our work related to the Postal Service's delivery performance in Baltimore, Maryland.

Our mission, to ensure the efficiency, accountability, and integrity of our Nation's Postal Service, is something we take very seriously. The Postal Service has reported it had a successful peak holiday season nationwide with no significant issues, although it has not reported on how it did in specific locations such as Baltimore, which has been challenged with timely mail delivery for years.

Because of those challenges, last May Congressmen Mfume and Ruppertsberger asked us to review mail delivery and customer service operations in the Baltimore area. In response, we initiated an audit focused on nine delivery units in Baltimore. We visited these units last June and found delayed mail at each, totaling almost a million pieces.

One of the main drivers of these delays was employee shortages due to COVID, and we identified some opportunities for the Postal Service to improve hiring and retention. This included offering more opportunities for new employee training and identifying and filling vacant positions in a timely manner. Postal management agreed with all of our recommendations and has either fully addressed or is taking action to address them.

We also initiated an audit on Baltimore's mail processing facility to identify issues that could affect the timeliness of mail delivery. We found the plant had many manager and supervisor vacancies due to a hiring freeze. In addition, broken equipment required employees to manually transfer mail between floors using elevators, adding two hours per day to move the mail. These problems, along with supervision, communication, and coordination issues, resulted in mail being brought to the docks later than planned. As a result, trucks left late or additional transportation had to be used, leading to increased costs and greater risk of delayed mail.

Postal management generally agreed with our findings and was responsive to most of our recommendations.

Because we know timely mail delivery is important to all Postal customers, we developed a service performance website that shows delivery performance over time by geographic area and mail class. For several years, Baltimore had low service scores that were largely below the national average. Then, around July 2020, Baltimore service performance scores began to decline and did not start to improve until April 2021. The most recently released data shows service performance in Baltimore steadily improved through this past September, although it has remained consistently below the national average.

Another way we have focused on service issues is by strategically structuring our resources to perform groupings of audits in specific

geographic locations, similar to the work we performed here in Baltimore. This will allow us to provide a more comprehensive look at mail processing and delivery issues at each location. We recently finished our work in Portland, Oregon, and have begun work in Columbus, Ohio and San Diego, California.

In addition, we have prioritized work related to national service issues. This past fall, we published a report on nationwide service performance that identified the most common causes of service failures, which were a shortage of employees, insufficient operational and transportation capacity, and facilities not always properly sorting mail and parcels.

Another recent report looked at the Postal Service's preparedness for the holiday season and found that it had addressed some of the conditions that led to last year's problems. We observed operations and monitored performance data throughout the peak holiday season and will issue a report this spring on how the Postal Service performed.

In an upcoming project, we will report on how the Postal Service manages its delivery operations, with a focus on undelivered routes. We are also reviewing the 10 lowest-performing mail processing plants, including the Baltimore and Linthicum facilities, to determine the root causes of the service problems.

Finally, we know there is a concern that planned Postal changes will impact mail service in Baltimore, as well as the rest of the country. We currently have an audit on the Postal Service's "Delivering for America" plan that looks at how the Postal Service developed its forecasts and how it will measure the plan's success. As the Postal Service continues to roll out its plan, we will monitor and evaluate its effectiveness and success, as well as identify any impacts on mail delivery.

We understand how important the Postal Service and timely delivery is to its customers in Baltimore and around the country. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work, and I am happy to answer your questions.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Ms. Perez. You are a pro. You had 26 more seconds. Great.

Mr. Westmoreland, you are recognized for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF RICTARSHA WESTMORELAND, MAIL PROCESSING CLERK AND SHOP STEWARD, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Ms. WESTMORELAND. Hi. Good morning. This is Ms. Westmoreland.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Oh, excuse me.

Ms. WESTMORELAND. Good morning, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, and distinguished members of the Maryland congressional delegation. My name is Rictarsha Westmoreland. USPS hired me as a Postal Support Employee, PSE, in 2016 to work in the Linthicum incoming mail facility, located just outside of Baltimore. Today, in addition to my postal duties, I serve as a shop steward and trustee for the Baltimore Francis Stu Filbey Area Local 181 of the American Postal Workers Union. My local and na-

tional union represents more than 200,000 of the 630,000 postal workers who proudly accept, sort, process, transport, and deliver mail to 161 million addresses a day.

As a Marylander, I appreciate the committee's concern over USPS' performance in Baltimore and its ongoing efforts to protect the Postal Service.

The Linthicum facility is an essential part of the Baltimore region's mail system, with nearly 50 percent of the facility's mail originating from Baltimore. It is not an exaggeration to say that the problems I witness at my facility result in mail delays for the entire country. We must address the Baltimore region's mail delays and United States Postal Service's ever-declining service standards before customers lose confidence in their Postal Service.

My coworkers and I are bombarded by media reports and customer complaints about lost and delayed mail. I hear from friends and loved ones about how USPS' delays affect our communities when we fail to deliver life-saving medications, wedding invitations, retirement checks, and bill payments on time, which results in late fees.

Unfortunately, the frustration we witness from the public is not unique. In preparation for this hearing, I reviewed a November 2021 Office of the Inspector General audit report that found that the Baltimore region had the second-highest number of lost mail inquiries of any major metropolitan area. The same report found that the former Baltimore district failed to meet its performance targets every week during the 96-week audit for flagship products, including First-Class Mail.

While this performance is embarrassing, it is preventable. We can restore the level of service Postal customers deserve with better managerial decisions. While the United States Postal Service's continued decline in service standards is at the root of many of the customer complaints I receive, the focus of my testimony will be on how a lack of staffing impacts the accuracy of our mail service.

In my facility, my union informed me that since September 11, 2021, there has been a reduction of 99 PSEs and 14 full-time regular clerks, for a total reduction of 113 mail processing clerks, a statistic that is only made worse by COVID absenteeism. Lead clerks are the individuals charged with training. However, because of the worker shortage, lead clerks are working on machines, and they cannot walk around and help new employees. As such, my colleagues, who are not designated trainers, are expected to step in and take on the task of training new employees in addition to their daily duties. My coworkers do their best but, like the lead clerks, they are overwhelmed. Often because of the physical distance between workstations, questions go unanswered, and mistakes happen.

I believe that the current delays we are witnessing across the Nation result from inadequate investments in staffing and poor management. We do not have enough workers, and when we hire, new employees are not trained how to sort the mail. This leads to mail being given to carriers out of order, which forces letter carriers to skip entire blocks and bring mail back to the station, or worse, mail to be delivered to the wrong address.

The problems we face—disrespectful management, a flawed onboarding process, and chronic understaffing—are reversible. But even if we were able to start meeting our performance targets, the United States Postal Service would still be slower than the public deserves until we return to the 2012 service standards.

Baltimore certainly has its problems, but, like every other Postal facility across the country, it has a dedicated group of Postal workers who genuinely want to see management step up and make the improvements we desperately need. I hope that my testimony may aid us in taking a step in the right direction and move the United States Postal Service toward not just meeting its current performance targets but to restoring itself to the 2012 service standards the American public deserves.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Wow. Seven seconds to go. You are even better than Ms. Perez. Thank you so much, Ms. Westmoreland.

And finally, Mr. Chuck Metzger is recognized for his opening summary statement.

STATEMENT OF CHUCK METZGER, CONTROLLER, REBUILD METRO

Mr. METZGER. Good morning, everyone. I appreciate the opportunity of giving my testimony today. My name is Charles Metzger, and I am the Controller of ReBUILD Metro. We are a non-profit organization in Baltimore whose mission is to revitalize east Baltimore through the redevelopment of vacant and abandoned properties. Our organization has redeveloped over 450 abandoned buildings in our community, reducing our vacancy rate by 90 percent and creating quality, affordable housing, parks, green spaces, and small retail businesses. We utilize grants, donations, and philanthropic promissory notes—loans—to finance our work.

In the regular course of business, each December we mail interest payments to our investors. In January 2021, we received five calls for investors looking for their 2020 payments. They did not receive them in the checks that we mailed in December. We issued stop payments on the checks and reissued the interest payment using electronic ACH transfers.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. During the first quarter of 2021, we did not receive mail for six weeks. After numerous calls to our post office on Shady Avenue in Baltimore City, we received some mail but not the full complement of what was missing.

The lack of regular U.S. mail deliveries presents a significant hardship because our operations are dependent on receiving grant payments, donations, and vendor invoices on all of our mail. In addition to impacting our revenues, the service problems affect our expenses. ReBUILD Metro owns 160 properties for which we pay monthly utility bills. We are no longer receiving these consistently. Due to the missing utility bills and invoices, we have incurred hundreds of dollars in late fees due to missing invoices.

Following the utility bill issue, I filed a complaint with the Postmaster in Washington, DC. When the D.C. office replied to my request, they indicated that the carrier could not access our mailbox.

This statement has no grounds. Our office is on a corner of a rowhome in east Baltimore, and we have been served for several years through a U.S. mailbox on the front of our building. Additionally, we have a second entrance with a private mail slot which serves to collect rent and other community correspondence. Following another month of failed Postal service, we contacted Congressman Mfume's office. Within a week of communicating with Congressman Mfume's office, normal mail delivery resumed. We thought our USPS problems were resolved, but in December 2021 the service issues emerged again.

In December 2021, we mailed our annual interest payments to our investors, whose funding makes much of east Baltimore's revitalization possible. Over the past two weeks, we received calls from our investors stating that the annual interest payments were not received. We were again forced to stopped payment on the checks and issue electronic ACH transfers. A few days later, one investor called stating that they had finally received their check, but it was postmarked January 21, 2022. We mailed several of the interest checks to them on December 15, 2020, which arrived as scheduled. This situation undermines ReBUILD Metro's credibility, calling into question our competency, financial management, or both.

In addition to ReBUILD Metro's problems with the mail, our community residents are experiencing the same failures in USPS service. ReBUILD Metro may worry about its reputation, but some of our most vulnerable community members are exposed to much greater hardships when they incur late fees which they cannot afford or receive late unemployment or Social Security checks. We ask you to complete a full review of the USPS services in our community.

I want to thank you again for giving me the time to speak.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Metzger, thank you so much.

We are now going to go into question time for members. I would ask everyone to try to respect the five-minute rule because we have 15 members participating in this hearing.

The Chair is delighted to recognize the distinguished senior member, our senator from Maryland, Mr. Cardin, for his round of questioning.

Senator CARDIN. Once again, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. And let me thank all four of our witnesses.

Mr. Gilbert, are you satisfied with the progress you have made in Baltimore?

Mr. GILBERT. No, sir.

Senator CARDIN. I am glad to hear you say that because we have been working on this for a long time—

Mr. CONNOLLY. May I interrupt for just one second?

Mr. Gilbert, it is hard to hear you. You have a soft voice, which is great, but if you could just move that mic closer to your mouth so we can get it.

Mr. GILBERT. How about now?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much.

Senator CARDIN. I am glad to hear you say that you are not satisfied. We have been working on this for a long time, before you got into your current position. At one time the Baltimore district was putting mail they couldn't sort into trailers, just sitting there

for a long period of time. No wonder they were either lost or months in delay. At other times you have indicated you have rented additional auxiliary space, which is not an efficient way to operate when you have to work between different spaces. We have already heard from Ms. Westmoreland about how difficult it is just to get through the facilities when you do this temporary change.

We had been told that Baltimore needed new equipment because some of the equipment just wasn't functioning properly, and it looks like it is still in that status. We were told Baltimore and Linthicum needed major upgrades, and I don't think the upgrades have been done.

My question to you is if you are not satisfied, every area of the country has challenges with COVID and the work force, so why isn't there more urgent attention to dealing with the root causes of the inefficiencies in Baltimore, lost mail in Baltimore, the lengthy delays in Baltimore, which is causing immeasurable hardship?

Mr. GILBERT. From a customer service standpoint, sir, we make every effort to ensure that when we receive the mail, we deliver the mail.

Senator CARDIN. But that is not happening. We saw a constant—the IG's report showed that from July 20 of last year, 2020, through April 2021, there was a constant decline in service. Some progress was made, and then it was lost again.

We know that the mail is being lost. We are getting these reports. The witnesses are telling us; our constituents are telling us. Our own families are not getting the mail delivered. It could be months that I don't get a financial statement from one of my accounts because it is just lost in the mail. This is routine.

Mr. GILBERT. Anything prior to October, sir, my arrival, there were some mail condition concerns within the city of Baltimore. Since my arrival at the beginning of October, our mail conditions have improved with the effort of every piece leaving our delivery units.

Senator CARDIN. So, you have been saying you have a difficult time justifying, I guess to your supervisors, filling positions in the Baltimore region because they haven't been declared open. Did I hear you correctly in your testimony?

Mr. GILBERT. No, sir. Within the city of Baltimore, from a supervisory staff standpoint, we only have two vacancies.

Senator CARDIN. So you have enough people now.

Mr. GILBERT. We do have enough people. Yes, sir.

Senator CARDIN. So in your testimony you said that your major problem was having enough personnel and training. I thought those were the two reasons that you were giving for the problem.

Mr. GILBERT. That would be correct, sir, prior to October. Since my arrival, again, we focused on our hiring and our training. At this point, with our hiring and training, we are at staffing and complement.

Senator CARDIN. So, are you satisfied now that you have the resources to be able to meet the delivery standards that are expected?

Mr. GILBERT. No, sir.

Senator CARDIN. So, what do you need?

Mr. GILBERT. We need consistent employee availability. Basically, we are relying on our employees, to include our management staff members, to come to work when scheduled. That is our primary need at this point.

Senator CARDIN. So it is not the numbers that you have. It is that you have absenteeism as a result of COVID. Is that the problem?

Mr. GILBERT. Separate from COVID as well, sir. Employees call in FMLA conditions, et cetera, to where they are not regularly in attendance.

Senator CARDIN. And this is unique to this region as compared to other regions in the country?

Mr. GILBERT. It is not unique to this region. Unfortunately, we have a higher absentee rate here in the city of Baltimore to where it was too comfortable for folks to pick up the phone and call in sick. Part of my process since I have been here is daily, we review our employee attendance as in how many employees have not come to work and the reasons why, to include folks who have zero work hours; i.e., have not been to work in four weeks, minimum. We go through the process as to vetting their documentation, if received, and if not received, we have aggressively moved to have those employees removed off the rolls.

Senator CARDIN. Do you agree with the findings of the Inspector General?

Mr. GILBERT. I do, sir.

Senator CARDIN. And have you implemented all the recommendations?

Mr. GILBERT. We have, sir.

Senator CARDIN. Let me ask Ms. Perez, are you aware whether they have implemented all of the recommendations that you had?

Ms. PEREZ. Yes, sir. For the delivery unit report, they have implemented, out of the seven recommendations, I believe four we have been able to close. They have provided documentation and have taken action on the other three, but our responsibility is to do due diligence and hold the Postal Service accountable to have full assurance that there will be full implementation. So we are in open dialog with the Postal Service at this juncture to receive that additional support so we can fully close the other three recommendations.

Senator CARDIN. And, Mr. Gilbert, I take it that you agree that you want to close those, so you are going to be fully cooperative in implementing the recommendations of the Inspector General?

Mr. GILBERT. That is correct, sir.

Senator CARDIN. Well, what I find troubling about your testimony is that if it is a personnel issue that is driving—it doesn't seem like you are accepting the fact that we have had supervisory and managerial failures in the Baltimore region, by clear misdirection at times; and, as we see it, the failure to advocate for the resources that are necessary in order to bring the service levels up. We are, so far, an outlier. Don't you agree that the Baltimore region is an outlier among the Postal Service?

Mr. GILBERT. I would agree, sir, and there is a level of ownership from the management standpoint down to the local unit level as to the importance of, one, measuring service; and two, ensuring that

we provide the mail to the customers within the communities we serve. So when we talk about a management issue, that is all the way down to the local unit level. We have that level of ownership.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Senator Cardin.

Let me just say, this issue of absenteeism came up in our October hearing in Chicago that it is really a Service-wide problem, during the pandemic certainly. But it is also important to note, as I think you were doing, Senator, that the problem predates the pandemic in terms of service delivery, before your time in October. But we are talking about a 10-year chronic problem here in Baltimore that is separate from the pandemic, or even the absenteeism that you are describing now.

Thank you, Senator.

Senator Van Hollen, delighted to recognize you for your round of questions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, thank you for holding this hearing.

Ms. Perez, I wanted to ask you a specific question that arose out of the hearing that I held last July in the Appropriations Committee dealing with service and materials for the blind. One of the witnesses we had there was Rania Dima, who was in the process of going blind and needed materials through the mail to help her learn braille before she went completely blind. And she testified that the delivery service for the program for Free Matter for the Blind, the deliveries were not on time at all. You are familiar with that service, right?

Ms. PEREZ. Yes, sir. We are in receipt of your request and that work is underway.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Now, just as I understand it, the Free Matter for the Blind material is supposed to be treated the same as First-Class Mail. Is that right?

Ms. PEREZ. That is my understanding as well, yes.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And what she told us was that the deliveries through that program were even later than First-Class Mail, which, as we are hearing today, was already bad enough. So we asked the Inspector General to look specifically into this issue. Can you give us an update today on when we can get a report back?

Ms. PEREZ. Yes, sir. My understanding is the planning is underway and we plan to announce that audit to the Postal Service within the next week or so, and we hope to have a final report sometime this summer, and we look forward to updating you on that.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. All right. We hope that you can get it to us as quickly as possible, and most importantly that that service can be up to speed as quickly as possible.

Ms. Perez, let me ask you a question, because we have the issue of delivery of mail once it is received by Mr. Gilbert and his team. But before that, it has to go through the processing system, right?

Ms. PEREZ. Correct.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And that means the Baltimore processing and distribution center is one of the major processing centers; is that right?

Ms. PEREZ. Correct.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Can you tell us how much of the delay in the Baltimore area relates to problems at the Baltimore processing and distribution center versus how much of it relates to problems after mail has left that center?

Ms. PEREZ. That is a good question. And unfortunately, based on the work that we had done in the area, I am unable to determine whether or not the problems are specific to the plant or they are specific to the delivery units. We looked at the nine delivery units in June of last year, and then we subsequently looked at the facility. We worked to try and see if there is a correlation there, but in this instance we did not necessarily have that.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. But you looked at nine units, right? Did you look to see whether mail was delayed in getting to those units compared to other processing centers around the country?

Ms. PEREZ. I am actually not sure whether or not that was part of the audit, the scope of the audit, so I would have to determine that and get back to you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Because part of the report from the Inspector General indicated that there was an especially high number of management vacancies at the distribution center; isn't that right?

Ms. PEREZ. Correct.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And according to my figures, in November of last year, the Baltimore processing and distribution center had three vacancies for managers of distribution operations and five vacancies for supervisors of distribution operations, partly because of a hiring freeze that had been in place earlier; is that correct?

Ms. PEREZ. That is correct.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And is that the hiring freeze that was put in place by Postmaster DeJoy?

Ms. PEREZ. I do not know who placed the hiring freeze, but it is the cause of the inability of the Postal Service at that facility to fill those positions.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Do you know why Baltimore would impose a hiring freeze on itself?

Ms. PEREZ. No, I don't.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So do you have an update as to how many of those vacancies, both for the processing and distribution center management of distribution operations and the supervisors, have been filled as of today?

Ms. PEREZ. I don't have actual numbers, but I do know that the Postal Service is making progress in filling those vacancies, and we will keep that recommendation open until we have full support from the Postal Service that they have filled all vacancies in the Baltimore P&DC.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. If you could get back to us and look into that particular question, because we have these two different components of mail delivery, and I think we are trying to get to the bottom of where the problems are, and there may be problems in both.

If I could just very briefly, Mr. Chairman, ask Mr. Gilbert about the metrics the Inspector General suggested that you use in determining whether or not you need extra resources, extra help. They

put forward metrics with respect to mail delivery, on-time, absentee rates. Are you familiar with the metrics that they put in place?

Mr. GILBERT. I am, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And they asked, I guess, you and your team to develop a system that would trigger requests for additional resources. Do you have those thresholds that you put in place?

Mr. GILBERT. We do, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And as of today, are you meeting those thresholds, or are you above or below those thresholds?

Mr. GILBERT. We are above those thresholds.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So the issue, back to Senator Cardin's question, is you are meeting those thresholds, but now it is a question of primarily absenteeism.

Mr. GILBERT. Yes, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen.

And if I could just follow-up on one point you were making, Ms. Perez, as to whether the hiring freeze that affects management, what was its genesis? Was there a hiring freeze under the previous Postmaster General?

Ms. PEREZ. I do not know, but I can state that that was a nationwide hiring freeze at the time. So, Senator, to your question, it was not specific to the Baltimore region.

Mr. CONNOLLY. No, but we are trying to determine when did a hiring freeze occur, and my distinct recollection is it occurred when Mr. DeJoy was named Postmaster General. His predecessor did not have such a hiring freeze that I am aware of, and that is what presumably we are still dealing with here in Baltimore in terms of the vacancies that Senator Van Hollen asked about.

Ms. PEREZ. I believe we documented the dates in the report, correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. OK, I appreciate that, thank you.

Mr. MFUME, you are recognized for your round of questions.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Gilbert, let's go back to some of your testimony, if you would, with respect to the questions from both of the senators. You stated that a lot of this ended or started getting better after your arrival in October of last year; is that correct?

Mr. GILBERT. Correct, sir.

Mr. MFUME. And do you have any idea before your arrival in October why things developed the way they did?

Mr. GILBERT. The primary reason being employee availability. We simply did not have enough employees report to work to effect delivery daily.

Mr. MFUME. Right. But as has been stated several times, this had been going on long before the pandemic. So any idea as to why it went on so long and why there was never an effort by your predecessors to correct it?

Mr. GILBERT. No idea, sir.

Mr. MFUME. OK. That time before October 2021 through the pandemic, and even before, part of that time you were the Postmaster; correct?

Mr. GILBERT. That is correct.

Mr. MFUME. So for seven of those months you were part of what we call, for lack of a better term, the problem that was existing at the time. When you were there as Postmaster previously, did you go to any of your supervisors or to the Postal Service or to anyone else as the Postmaster from Baltimore, which you were from March through October 2020, and say we have a problem?

Mr. GILBERT. I did, sir.

Mr. MFUME. And who did you report that to?

Mr. GILBERT. At the time, a district manager.

Mr. MFUME. And who was that person?

Mr. GILBERT. He has since retired, Darryl Martin.

Mr. MFUME. And what was the reply?

Mr. GILBERT. We need to do what is necessary to increase our complement and control employee availability.

Mr. MFUME. So he really didn't go to the heart of fixing the problem that you pointed out?

Mr. GILBERT. He and I did not have that conversation; no, sir.

Mr. MFUME. So, was there anything you could do as Postmaster yourself at the time to correct or start correcting the issues that we all have been talking about here today?

Mr. GILBERT. My effort was to gain a better understanding of why it was so comfortable for employees not to come to work. It was a novelty to me the number of employees that we had absent on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. MFUME. OK. So, we are in the pandemic. You leave and then you come back and you become Postmaster again. Did you then or do you now have an idea of how to stem that issue, how to get around that? I mean, do you have a plan when it comes to vacancies? Because they are going to be with us for a while. I am just trying to figure out, going forward, what is your plan to deal with that?

Mr. GILBERT. Well, we will always have vacancies. It is the open route plan which creates the challenges. So part of my initial strategy in the first week reassuming the role in Baltimore was to look at our employee availability, have we improved or did we get worse, and then what strategies that I have learned in conjunction with the headquarters' initiative to drive employee availability, get our employees to come to work.

Mr. MFUME. And did you do that also when you were Postmaster previously?

Mr. GILBERT. In the beginning I did not, sir, but as we progressed through the pandemic, in the later months, I established that strategy; yes, sir.

Mr. MFUME. OK. And what about the issue of absenteeism, which is going to be with us whether we like it or not and affects all sectors of the society? What is the plan that you have in place knowing that absenteeism continues to be a problem, to get around it?

Mr. GILBERT. Become more aggressive when it comes to the removal of employees on the rolls, ensuring that the proper documentation is sent to those employees, and if we do not get a timely response, instead of delaying it, we move quickly to how those employees are removed, simply put.

Mr. MFUME. OK. So if you have to start removing employees, do you have a pool or a batch of potential employees that you have already interviewed and they clearly meet the standards and they are waiting and eager to be hired? Or are you letting people go without anyone to replace them, increasing the number of vacancies?

Mr. GILBERT. There is a pool. We have what we call the automated posting system in the city of Baltimore. Basically, it is a one-for-one. As we remove, whether it be based on attrition or termination, then we will automatically move to replace that employee on the rolls.

Mr. MFUME. So, Mr. Gilbert, you must understand the absolute frustration of many of us, particularly those of us who represent Baltimore, who have seen this go on and on and on. In addition to Mr. DeJoy being replaced or removed, there have got to be things in place on the ground where Postmasters like yourself look at all of the extenuating circumstances and problems and start aggressively figuring out a measurable plan forward.

So, 11 months after the release of the OIG report, Baltimore is still ranked among the worst in the Nation, which really, really, really troubles me. It ought not be that way, and we can't allow it to continue to be that way.

So, can you guarantee on the record today to this committee that you will put in place a significant increase in service and in operations that will alleviate this problem from this area?

Mr. GILBERT. We are in that process and working toward continuing, continuous improvement, sir.

Mr. MFUME. Well, you were doing that the first time you were Postmaster of the area. Can you guarantee, though, that there will, from this point onward, be a significant change in those numbers and in terms of the operation here in Baltimore?

Mr. GILBERT. My daily focus is that, to ensure we get better and we get it right, moving the mail to the customers within the communities we serve.

Mr. MFUME. But you can't guarantee it?

Mr. GILBERT. Not at this time, sir.

Mr. MFUME. I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Mfume.

The gentleman from Baltimore, Mr. Ruppertsberger, is recognized.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Perez, I want to thank you and your office for the timely completion of a thorough audit. Some of the post offices you looked at—Essex, Parkville, Rosedale, and Dundalk—are all in my district—did not report a single piece of delayed mail, not one, even though they were collectively responsible for more than 258,000 delayed mail items.

My question: When the post office fails to accurately scan mail pieces, how does this impact the ability of customers to reliably trace and receive letters and packages that they desperately need?

Ms. PEREZ. Yes, sir. Thank you for your question. As you can imagine, without proper procedures implemented with regard to mail processes, that would leave a visibility issue not only within the Postal Service with regard to their ability to ensure that they

are monitoring operations, but it would also leave a visibility issue with regards to constituents and the inability to track their, for example, mail packages throughout the process.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. OK, thank you.

Ms. Westmoreland, is she on the Zoom?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. Yes, sir. This is Westmoreland.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Yes, thank you. Countless Postal employees have stated they were over-worked and exhausted as post offices continued to remain understaffed. My office has heard from many Postal workers about the culture inside post offices. I have heard of employee fear of retaliation if they file grievances or speak publicly about the culture in their post office. Reportedly, departments have been understaffed, and they have been working more overtime hours than their contracts have allowed. The former Baltimore Postmaster Williamson admitted they are borderline breaking labor laws.

Now, we need to fully staff post offices and address these unacceptable management issues. Ms. Westmoreland, do you feel supervisors are properly trained? Yes or no?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. No.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Are there enough employees to sort and deliver mail in a timely manner?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. No.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. OK, I thank you.

Postmaster Gilbert, while the U.S. Postal Service is an independent agency and does not receive tax dollars, we are here to help. The Postal Service must increase transparency and ask for help when needed.

Now, I know your background. I know you were here when we had a lot of these problems started, and now you are back again to manage. I am telling you from my position, representing a lot of the area where there is a problem, we have to learn from our past mistakes to move forward. I am asking you—and I am glad that Congressman Mfume followed that area of questioning as far as you are concerned because basically you are there and we need your leadership, and some of the things that we need to know and I would like to know is when you were in leadership, and now you are where you are now, where you are the focus of a lot of this, what did you learn now based on what happened in the past that you think you can do to improve the operation and make the decisions that are necessary to deliver the mail on time to our constituents?

Mr. GILBERT. Part of it, sir, is the messaging to the employees I directly oversee to create the level of—make them uncomfortable with the thought of storing or warehousing mail. We have been driving, or I have been driving the message that it is not OK to delay, and that was the primary failure point from a mail condition standpoint.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Now, you had to know there were major problems that we have discussed today when you were in charge, and I would like to know, when you saw these issues, who would you go to in Mr. DeJoy's office? Where would you take these issues when you knew that there was a problem, you couldn't get it solved for whatever reason? You have to go to your superiors and ask for

more resources or change the system or whatever. What did you do in that regard as it related to contacting DeJoy or his office, his leadership team?

Mr. GILBERT. Well, I wouldn't contact Mr. DeJoy directly. I would follow the leadership chain and the hierarchy. I would go through the district manager, and then we would—

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. And who was that? Who was that when you were there?

Mr. GILBERT. Currently, that is Laura McLucas.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. OK.

Mr. GILBERT. And then we would have conversations and discussions with our area vice president.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. OK. And then what happened?

Mr. GILBERT. And then our area vice president would be our sounding board and/or advocate, whether we would need to hire more and/or what our mail conditions are as far as allocating resources—

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. And I assume it didn't happen because you see we are the worst in the country, No. 1 worst in the country based on what the Inspector General has stated. That is a bad place to be for all of us, and we see the results.

Now, I personally, and I know our team, wants to get it fixed, so we are going to do what we can to work with you. We ask you these questions that are uncomfortable, and you were a part of that system, but we only ask them so we can work with you and help you. I think you have noticed that we have not publicly criticized you personally. But you are part of the leadership team, and you are in the unique position that you can learn from what you did, what the problems were in the past, so we can help you work in the future.

My last question: What do you think you need from Congress?

Mr. GILBERT. From Congress, to assist us with the Job Fairs, that information, and the assistance from the Maryland delegation, that was very helpful. Right now, I think we have the necessary tools, materials, and employees to accomplish the mission, sir.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. And do you have a direct line to your leadership team?

Mr. GILBERT. I do.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. OK. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Ruppensberger.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Was I on time?

Mr. CONNOLLY. What was that?

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Was I on time?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Perfect, as always.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Thank you, Gerald. I thank you.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Charles.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CONNOLLY. The gentle lady from the District of Columbia, Congresswoman Norton, is recognized for her line of questioning.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

This is a hearing that I think unfolds a lot of information that is relevant to districts around the country. I want to begin by not-

ing, as I did in my opening statement, that since virtually the start of Postmaster General DeJoy's tenure I have received a deluge of complaints from constituents about not receiving timely delivery of their mail, often with mail just never arriving. This indicates that we have a ubiquitous, a nationwide problem, exemplified by today's hearing focusing on Baltimore in particular.

My question is for Ms. Westmoreland. Ms. Westmoreland, I would like to highlight a few specific examples of problems my constituents are facing, and I note that these are not just cases from the past two years. These are cases that are currently pending for which I am still awaiting a response from the Postal Service, and they join many others still awaiting a response from the U.S. Postal Service.

One of my constituents runs a health care practice out of his home, and his business is hindered because important insurance documents and checks have not been delivered. He knows that these documents and checks should have been delivered because he has signed up for—and I am quoting—“informed delivery.” His rightful concern is that even beyond the significant inconvenience this causes, documents related to health and finances are lost altogether.

Another constituent said that the lack of mail delivery has resulted in not receiving tax documents, correspondence from the D.C. Superior Court, insurance benefits, and credit card bills.

I would like to ask you, Ms. Westmoreland, since you are probably one of the most on-the-ground witnesses today, what changes do you think the Postal Service leadership should make that would help the hard-working employees of the Postal Service like you, who are not the root cause of these issues and who work tirelessly every single day to make sure the mail gets delivered? I would like your input specifically on what changes you, who are on the ground working every day, think the Postal leadership should make that would help you in the delivery of mail.

Ms. WESTMORELAND. As an employee, I believe that an agreement or leadership roles that they should make, it needs to start with proper staffing. The staffing is a management issue. We have to have the right people or the manpower to make sure that we are getting the mail out in an accurate timeframe.

And then also something that I would think we would need from management is for the managers to be properly trained. A lot of the managers are put in operations based off the business need. So they are originally PSEs. They convert to career employees. And then after they are career employees they go up to lead clerks, expeditors, or 204Bs, or even higher in the management.

Ms. NORTON. Do they get any training as they move up?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. To my knowledge, I do not have the facts on that. But based off of working with the managers that I currently have in my facility, I would say no, they do not receive that training or they are not retrieving that training, because from what I heard from prior supervisors, that they take training (inaudible). Now, if that is true or not, I am not sure.

Ms. NORTON. What I have been hearing directly from you is important here in that the Postmaster and other leadership need to convene a meeting of employees to get their input.

Ms. WESTMORELAND. I agree.

Ms. NORTON. That kind of on-the-ground back and forth I think would help in improving the Postal Service.

I want to close by reiterating that this situation is simply unacceptable and that Postmaster General DeJoy should either resign or be removed.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentle lady and thank her for her commitment.

The gentleman from Chicago, Illinois, Mr. Davis, is recognized for his round of questioning.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And let me thank our witnesses.

While I don't know a great deal about what would be happening in Baltimore, I would like to ask Ms. Westmoreland, given all of the information that we continue to hear, there are some individuals who feel that the Postal Service has a mandate that is too heavy to lift; that is, to provide First-Class Mail service to all of the individuals in the United States of America, no matter where they are and no matter where they live. And given that it must be self-sufficient in terms of living off the revenue that it generates, from your vantage point and from what you just kind of know and feel, not that it is your job or responsibility to know that, do you feel that the resources that it has are enough to fulfill the mandate, which is tremendous? And that while we make improvement, while we do certain things with the work force, while we improve the management relationship, while we do all of those things, do you think that is sufficient to get to the end line or to get across the goalposts that we all seem to be saying we want to reach?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. I am not sure. Can you elaborate more when you say "mandate," what you are talking about exactly?

Mr. DAVIS. Well, the mandate is to deliver mail to everybody in the United States of America who are listed as having an address.

Ms. WESTMORELAND. OK. Sorry to have cut you off. So the question that you are asking me is do I believe that we have enough resources for the mandate?

Mr. DAVIS. Yes.

Ms. WESTMORELAND. No, I do not believe that we have the appropriate resources for the mandate for everyone to be able to get their mail in a timely manner.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much, because I share, and while that does not take any responsibility from the management of Postal operations, I think it is something that we as a Congress also have to take a real hard look at and make some determinations in terms of you can't get blood out of a turnip. I am saying you cannot get blood out of a turnip. So I think there are some real serious discussions that we have to have, and I certainly think that management of Postal operations have to be as efficient and as creative and as good as you can possibly be in using the resources that we have. But I do think serious change is needed.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again for the opportunity to simply participate in this very serious undertaking, and I thank you very much and yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Davis, and thank you for your commitment. I know that you joined our committee in this Congress specifically to be able to address this issue of Postal reform and Postal delivery service, so thank you. And I do think you raise a very important point.

We passed almost \$6 trillion—trillion with a “T”—in COVID relief-related assistance and benefits, and except for a \$10 billion line of credit that ultimately was turned into a grant, we provided zero assistance to the Postal Service. And while we are bailing out whole industries, we did not do it for the Postal Service, arguably the single most important lifeline during the pandemic for Americans.

So there is some reckoning on the part of us in Congress that we have got to deal with, and I think you are quite correct, Mr. Davis, to point that out.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Sarbanes, who has been patiently waiting, is recognized. Mr. Sarbanes.

Mr. SARBANES. Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Gilbert, I wanted to address some questions to you. Shortly after you stepped into your current role, you will remember we had the chance to talk about some of the challenges and the long-standing staffing issues that the Postal Service faces in the Baltimore region. One of those has been hiring. You have been very candid about that, especially given the limited capacity at the training academy. When we spoke before, you mentioned the opening of a second facility for training. I was hoping you could maybe give us an update on that process and, for starters, how has that gone? How is the process going with the second academy? Are you seeing improvements in your ability to quickly and efficiently train staff there?

Mr. GILBERT. Yes, sir. As mentioned, we have had an increase to where with the single academy we are only able to process or on-board seven employees per week. Since the additional academy, we have increased from seven to 32 per week, to include we have added a second driver’s training course, which has also helped expedite the on-boarding process.

Mr. SARBANES. I wanted to talk about the broader challenge of recruitment in Baltimore for employees. Congressman Mfume talked to you about the pool that is kind of there to fill positions once you can actually process those vacancies in a proper way. But my sense from talking to you before and just kind of keeping my radar up is that getting employees into that pool in a way that can actually sustain the work force in the Baltimore area is a huge ongoing challenge, and I would like you to speak a little bit more to that.

First of all, do you have a sense in the various categories of the Postal Service in the Baltimore district what the average tenure looks like for an employee in those categories and how that compares to, say, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 5 years ago? Give me some kind of frame of reference for that.

Mr. GILBERT. Well, in my 26 years in the Postal Service, with many of those years being in management, it was almost a novelty to see a career employee with 20-plus years resign from the United States Postal Service. I have seen that here in Baltimore City due

to workload conditions, et cetera, or personal situations. So that in itself creates a problem to where our retention period or our retention rate is not where we need to be from a national average standpoint, but it does create a challenge within the city of Baltimore.

Mr. SARBANES. So you have two problems caught in the switches here. One is that it sounds like the attrition rate is accelerating, you are not getting the same longevity in the work force, and then when those vacancies are created, trying to fill them is that much harder. Can you speak to the credentials of the staff that you are hiring up? You have these training academies now, which is great. Do you feel that the ability to get the new work force trained up in a way that will keep them in those positions is where it needs to be? And just talk again more broadly—I mean, I would just like to hear your candid assessment of how hard or easy it is to find a good Postal employee out there in the pool, bring them into the Postal Service, and then have some confidence that, once trained, they are going to stay. And as part of that answer maybe tell me a little bit about the attrition rate just within the newly recruited pool. If you are getting 100 new people in—let's just use that as an example—if I came back a year later or two years later, would I see 90 of those employees, or would I see 50, or would I see 25? Give me a sense of that.

Mr. GILBERT. Well, I think in the current environment we could probably see about 80 percent of those employees. As mentioned, sir, carrying mail is not easy. So many folks are on-boarded, and then when they physically get out there to perform the task, it is not something that they thought it would be. On average, I receive 10 to 12 resignations from non-career or pre-career employees a week, and most of the reasons being the work was just not what it was, some scheduling issues, and/or the conditions from a workload standpoint they weren't willing to endure. So that aspect of it, it is hard to retain our employees from the pre-career standpoint.

That is when our recruitment comes in. We have a one-on-one process to where we call these employees prior to accepting their resignation to say what can we do to keep you, and then what is it going to take to retain you once you come back. Some of the answers or responses are not obtainable, and then they choose to separate from the organization. So not so much as attrition, but our employee turnover rate is a little bit out of our control.

Mr. SARBANES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know my time has expired, but I think the staffing issue is a huge challenge, particularly here in the Baltimore area. It is not unlike first-and second-year teachers, holding on to them and figuring out all the different strategies to make sure they don't leave after all the hard work to get them on board. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Great point. Thank you so much, Mr. Sarbanes.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Raskin, is recognized for his questions.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The tax season is underway, so the problem of mis-delivery is very much on the mind of my constituents as people are waiting for important financial documents to arrive by mail. One of my constituents has been missing a letter from the Maryland Department of Labor, a W-2 form and an important bank document, and many

of their neighbors are also experiencing the same thing with missing mail. I have constituents reporting that they are getting up to three or four mis-deliveries a week. It comes to the right street but the wrong number, or the right number but the wrong street. I also have constituents who tell me that they have asked for mail to be held or forwarded, but it continues to pile up on their front porch or in their mailbox.

So when my office gets requests for help with Postal Service issues, my case workers contact the Postal Inspector Team to launch an investigation, and we are provided a written response from the Postal Service which is usually pretty generic, with promises of improvement in the future.

Ms. Westmoreland, does your leadership incorporate customer complaints and issues reported to the Postal Inspector Team into the trainings that are provided to your mail processing clerks?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. I don't have that name, sir.

Mr. RASKIN. OK.

Mr. Gilbert, in your experience, when a case worker reports a recurring issue to the Postal Service such as consistent mis-deliveries in a neighborhood, does the Postal Service share these concerns with the relevant post office? What actions are you taking to ensure that the issue is addressed?

Mr. GILBERT. The situations are addressed at the local unit level down to the employee to determine if he or she is a repeat offender. What I mean by repeat offender, are there constant complaints that employees are mis-delivering mail. If that is the case, we track via our logs, and then we move to be corrective, and in some cases that may require discipline.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I mentioned the problem of mailbox thefts, which is now a rampant problem in Silver Spring; and in Bethesda, I mentioned I spoke to some constituents this morning who lost a check for nearly \$5,000. One in Silver Spring put a check for \$10,000 in the mail to a relative, and when it was deposited, they contacted their family member to confirm it had been cashed, and to their astonishment the family member had never gotten it. It had been deposited by a total stranger and forged with their name. Thankfully, the constituent's bank was able to mark it as a counterfeit and the \$10,000 was restored. But this is going on in a lot of different cases.

I am wondering, Mr. Gilbert, in your experience, when the Postal Service is alerted that a mailbox may have been compromised by people either fishing in or removing the bottom, which I have heard about, what steps are you taking to secure the mailbox and to replace the lock, or perhaps to monitor it?

Mr. GILBERT. In many cases when we talk about the blue collection boxes on the street that have been tampered with and/or an individual mailbox, we review it to see if the box can be modified. Can the box be modified to ensure that once mail is deposited, that it can only be removed once we access via the key? So we do go through that process and review once it is escalated to us.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. In several the cases that I have heard about, there are actually a lot of Good Samaritans/active citizens who have gotten involved if they either learn of a theft ring they are

willing to come forward and talk about it, or if they see something they are willing to talk about it.

Ms. Perez, has the OIG looked at this whole issue of mailbox theft? And what recommendations can you make to the Postal Service? I consider this a really serious problem, and we need to crack down on this basic threat to the integrity of the mail system.

Ms. PEREZ. Yes, sir. Any theft allegations that we would receive we take very seriously. We at the OIG, we investigate employee misconduct or theft. So with regard to external theft—for example, with the blue mailboxes—that would be the responsibility and jurisdiction of the Postal Inspection Service.

Mr. RASKIN. I see. But you are saying that some of the thefts that you have discovered have been internal to the Postal Service?

Ms. PEREZ. Correct. If we receive allegations of employee mail theft, we would be responsible for looking into those.

Mr. RASKIN. And just tell us quickly, if you would, what happens in a case like that?

Ms. PEREZ. Our Office of Investigations would investigate thoroughly, and they would then in turn make recommendations to the Postal Service with regard to what they found, and then the Postal Service would take action.

Mr. RASKIN. And that is a crime, so they would presumably be investigated and charged?

Ms. PEREZ. Correct, if there would be, for example, the willingness of an Assistant U.S. Attorney to take on a case.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Well, I thank you for your attention to that.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your indulgence.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Mr. Raskin.

And before I call on Ms. Brown, the gentle lady from Cleveland, Mr. Metzger, I think you wanted to make an intervention.

Mr. METZGER. I wanted to ask the Postmaster, we went twice in the beginning of the year, a six-week period, without getting mail. I stated earlier we get 160 water bills a month, so that is the equivalent of 480 bills over that time period.

Where is that mail? We have never received it. The checks that we sent out never got to the people who they were supposed to. My question is just where is that mail sitting at now?

Mr. CONNOLLY. By the way, I believe my Valentine's Day card to my wife might be included in that mail.

[Laughter.]

Mr. GILBERT. I can tell you, Mr. Metzger, that when there is a situation in the mail conditions where we have mail that is not delivered, it typically is staged at the carrier's work station or within the local delivery unit.

Mr. METZGER. But I haven't received 480 pieces of water bills from the beginning of the year. We never received them.

Mr. GILBERT. Well, I can directly tell you, sir, that I myself went and surveyed the delivery route that falls in your delivery address, and that route is 100 percent current. There is no mail staged or warehoused within that facility. So if we received it, we delivered it.

Mr. METZGER. OK.

Mr. CONNOLLY. OK. Ms. Brown, you are recognized for your round of questioning.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, and thank you for holding this hearing. And thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today.

First, I would like to thank our Postal Service workers. Through rain, sleet, hail, snow, and even a pandemic, U.S. Postal workers work around the clock to serve every address in America.

Unfortunately, in recent days I have heard from many of my constituents who are experiencing some of the same issues that have been discussed today around delivery delays. Mail may be delivered once or twice a week, and sometimes even every other week. My office has sent an inquiry to the Postal Service with specific questions about its service performance in northeast Ohio, and I look forward to a response so we can work to resolve the issues in an expeditious fashion.

It is evident that mail delivery issues extend far beyond Baltimore, and we must work to ensure mail delivery improves before the American people lose total confidence in the Postal Service.

So my question is, the 2020 OIG report examining Postmaster DeJoy's operational changes identified they resulted in significant negative service impacts across the country. Even the Postal Regulatory Commission issued an advisory opinion stating that the plan to change service lacks supporting evidence.

Because of Mr. DeJoy's failure to engage critical stakeholders, including Congress, the Postal Regulatory Commission, unions, and Postal customers, the American people are left waiting to receive important packages for weeks on end. This is clearly unacceptable.

Ms. Perez, what are your plans to examine Mr. DeJoy's reasons for implementing sweeping operational changes?

Ms. PEREZ. So, with regard to sweeping operational changes—for example, initiatives that they have rolled out in their “Delivering for America” plan—we not only have ongoing audits—for example, looking at the metrics and how they will measure the success of that plan, and also looking at impacts to mail delivery—but we will also continue to look at separate initiatives that the “Delivering for America” plan will roll out, as well as the \$40 billion in investments that are instituted in that plan. So we will have much ongoing work in those areas.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you so much.

Mr. Gilbert, service performance results for the Baltimore area are several percentage points lower than service performance across the rest of the Nation. So past, present, and future, what factors contribute to the lower results? I know we talked about absenteeism. Present, what progress has been made in the past year to improve that performance? And in the future, what can you do about effective training strategies that can be used to improve mail delivery?

Mr. GILBERT. Well, the same period last year, from quarter to quarter, quarter 1 of 2021 to quarter 1 of 2022, we have had a 30 percent increase in our service performance. It is not where we need to be, but that is the information that we are sharing with our employees. We are getting better in the process, but we are still missing the mark as far as our service scores are concerned.

That being said, our daily overview of our performance, whether it be previous day or pervious week, is part of our cadence. So we

share our results with our employees, with our eye on the prize being the target to provide the service to the customers.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you so much.

And last but not least, Ms. Westmoreland, can you just speak a little bit about how the lack of staffing and training at your facility affects the long-term health of the post office?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. I am sorry. Can you repeat that?

Ms. BROWN. Yes. How does the lack of staffing and training at your facility affect the long-term health of the post office?

Ms. WESTMORELAND. The long-term training and staffing affects us at the post office as an employee. Again, I will refer you back to a training issue and a staffing issue. A lot of the managerial that we have do not know how to properly do their job. So when it comes to delegation or when it comes to educating someone about the operation that they are currently working in, we don't have management that can give the proper expertise in that section. So it makes it hard to get the job completed.

Ms. BROWN. All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you for being so diligent as the newest member of our subcommittee.

Mr. Trone, you are batter up, and then it is only me after you.

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Chairman, thank you for putting me on the list today as part of Team Maryland.

The first question is for Mr. Gilbert. As I mentioned in my opening statement, much of western Maryland does not have reliable Internet connectivity due to lack of broadband. So we rely heavily on the Postal Service for bank notices, tax returns, paychecks even. Ever since the Cumberland sorting facility in Cumberland, Maryland, was closed several years ago, our mail is routed to Baltimore to be processed before it can be delivered, resulting in lengthy delays. In fact, my case workers up in Cumberland, when they have mail for western Maryland, don't mail it there. They mail it in Gaithersburg, because when it goes to Gaithersburg, it gets to western Maryland faster than it would if it started there.

So our question is proximity to Baltimore, should that really be the determining factor as to whether mail is delivered on time or not? What steps can be taken, Mr. Gilbert, to prioritize Postal deliveries to places like Cumberland so western Marylanders are not put at a disadvantage because of their geography?

Mr. GILBERT. Sir, I am not sure what steps could be taken from a mail processing standpoint. But from a delivery unit/customer service standpoint, our four-step process to ensure that we accurately collect, transport, process, and deliver the mail is the mission, starting from the collection point, to answer your question, sir.

Mr. TRONE. When these delays start at one day, by the time it gets back from Baltimore it is multiple-day delays, and it is just not satisfactory for folks in western Maryland. They feel like second-class citizens.

Let's jump over to Ms. Perez. In your testimony you mentioned that when the Postal Service implements network changes, it is often unable to improve service or realize the projected cost savings, and these changes can result instead in regional service

issues like we have in Cumberland. So the USPS closed Cumberland in 2012. They were supposed to shift to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, the processing center there, 70 miles away. However, constituents complained to my office that instead all their mail now goes to Baltimore, double that distance away, 140 miles. So if a Cumberland resident wants to mail something across the street, it goes 300 miles to Baltimore and back.

Is the OIG aware that mail in western Maryland is sent almost three hours across the state to return, given we have no processing centers to serve western Maryland?

Ms. PEREZ. That is not something we would specifically home in on. However, when we do select facilities and delivery units that we believe are ripe for a review, we would review data and metrics that the Postal Service maintains to be able to prioritize where we should focus our resources.

Mr. TRONE. Well, we would like the OIG team to take a look at this situation. It seems the current arrangement is not cost efficient, there are very much unfortunate delays, and with the difficulty of broadband, they need extra attention.

I will jump over to Mr. Gilbert again. We also have packages delivered by FedEx and UPS right to the local post office in western Maryland by these third-party deliverers only after UPS and FedEx drive it to Cumberland, to the post office. Then it gets sent to Baltimore for processing, where it is often delayed and in many cases lost forever. Have the changes you made in the last several months addressed this issue that these packages from FedEx and UPS are going from Cumberland to Baltimore and back? Has any progress been made on this issue? And also recovering the packages that have been lost in the system indefinitely that our constituents have brought to our attention?

Mr. GILBERT. Anything with a trackable bar code is measurable, so we are able to determine the disposition of a single mail piece. I can tell you once again, sir, once we receive the items or packages, we make every effort to deliver.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you to the witnesses. We need swift changes, no question about it.

Thank you, Chairman Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Trone.

And the last two questions of this hearing I am going to place.

One is I talked in my opening statement about the tray management system, absent which there are delays of several hours every day. That management system has been missing for three years, since March 2019. That was uncovered by the OIG report.

Ms. Perez, has that been ameliorated?

Ms. PEREZ. So, the Postal Service, when they replied in their official comments to our recommendation of that report, had basically stated that the Baltimore facility is a priority in its network modernization plan.

Mr. CONNOLLY. It is a priority.

Ms. PEREZ. The Baltimore facility is a priority in their network modernization plan. So they are doing some additional analysis and making a determination as to whether or not they will update that facility or expand that facility or replace.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So it is a priority, but they haven't yet ameliorated it.

Ms. PEREZ. Correct, with regard to the network modernization plan.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Three years and counting.

Ms. PEREZ. Correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. That is an interesting concept of what constitutes a priority.

Ms. PEREZ. Yes. We are in ongoing dialog with the Postal Service to understand that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Gilbert, why hasn't the Baltimore post office acted on the management tray issue with expedition?

Mr. GILBERT. That doesn't fall within my purview, sir. That is a mail processing venue, and that doesn't fall under Baltimore City.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I am sorry. You are the Postmaster for Baltimore.

Mr. GILBERT. For delivery and retail.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I see. So it is someone else's responsibility to look at a system that can expedite the sorting and ultimate delivery of mail?

Mr. GILBERT. That is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And who would that be?

Mr. GILBERT. The starting point would be the plant manager of the Baltimore facility, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And, I don't know, after this hearing might you drop a nice word in the ear of the plant manager that it might make sense to act on this after three years?

Mr. GILBERT. I will note that, sir. I will have that discussion.

Mr. CONNOLLY. We will count on you. Thank you, Mr. Gilbert.

Mr. GILBERT. Yes, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And my final question, and back to you again, Ms. Perez, the OIG in the report talked about and looked at nine Baltimore area post offices, and you were looking at delayed mail, already delayed. But then you discovered that it was not only delayed but they were underreporting how much delayed mail they had by 79 percent. Help us understand what it means to have undercounted delayed mail.

Ms. PEREZ. So when we conducted that work in June of last year, we had asked about the root causes or tried to observe conditions as to why that may occur, and what we were told at the time by the management at those units was that there was an employee availability issue. But as we continued to dig a little further, there were also issues, as Mr. Gilbert has stated, with regard to hiring, retention, training, as well as being able to track metrics to understand when they are having issues with regard to executing all duties at those delivery units.

Mr. CONNOLLY. OK.

I want to thank all of our panelists. I want to thank my colleagues for their diligence.

This is an important subject, and it has gotten more important especially during the pandemic. We have wonderful men and women serving the American public every day. We also have apparently some people who are gaming the system and not coming in to work, and that has to change. There have to be management

changes and, as Mr. Ruppertsberger said, we also in Congress need to bear what responsibility we can and should bear in assisting in the improvement of a service that is considered so essential by every American.

In closing, I want to insert into the record two U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General reports issued in 2021, the Mail Delivery and Customer Service Operations Select Baltimore Units, Baltimore, Maryland report; and the Efficiency of Operations in Baltimore, Maryland Processing and Distribution Center report.

Without objection, they shall be entered into the record.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And also without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses through the Chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses.

We would ask our witnesses, should you get such inquiries, please be as expeditious as you can in responding to our members with their queries.

It is quite something to have 15 members participate in a field hearing, which again underscores I think just the criticality of the issue and the commitment of our colleagues, especially from Maryland, to addressing this set of issues. We are going to have a press availability in about 5 or 10 minutes upstairs, so we are going to give everybody an opportunity to gather themselves and do that.

And unless there is further business to come before us, this field hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 1:30 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

