

# Statement for the Record

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For the Hearing of the House Subcommittee on Government Operations

# The Route Forward for the U.S. Postal Service: A View from Stakeholders

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## Why the Postal Police Force Must Be Restored and Redeployed

### Introduction

The Postal Police Officers Association (PPOA) represents uniformed police officers employed by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS). Postal Police Officers (PPOs) are assigned to major metropolitan areas of the U.S. PPOs are a highly trained uniformed federal police force specializing in mail theft prevention and the protection of postal employees. PPOs can be deployed anywhere in America. In fact, the Postal Inspection Service's website described Postal Police as an "elite police force." PPOs are not Postal Inspectors.

For 50 years, PPOs protected the Postal Service's most important assets; its employees and the mail — no matter the location. PPOs had police authority to patrol anywhere connected with postal property, whether at mail-processing facilities, on public roads used to transport mail, or on letter carrier routes prone to violent crime.

**In short, PPOs were — and still are — the most effective tool to prevent postal-related crime.**

## **A Criminal Free-For-All**

Since 2019, America's postal workforce has endured an unprecedented surge in violent crime. Robberies, assaults, and burglaries targeting USPS employees have escalated dramatically — a crisis triggered by a stunning policy decision: in August 2020, USPS stripped its uniformed federal law enforcement officers — the Postal Police Force — of authority to patrol beyond postal property.

The result? A collapse in mail security and a criminal free-for-all.

- Robberies of letter carriers increased by a staggering 781% from 2019 to 2023.
- Mail theft complaints rose by 327% from FY2018 to FY2023.
- High-volume mail theft attacks jumped from 2,251 in FY2010 to 49,156 in FY2023 — a **2,083% explosion**.

The significant increase in postal-related street crime is not merely an isolated surge in criminal activity; it reflects a broader systemic weakness within the nation's mail security infrastructure. Organized crime syndicates have increasingly turned to “hybrid” financial crimes, merging traditional mail theft with modern tools like AI-driven identity fraud and digital check manipulation.<sup>1</sup> As financial institutions fortify their cybersecurity, criminals are adapting to exploit the weakest link in the security chain: the physical mail system.

## **The Data Tells the Story**

According to FOIA data, 3,252 violent crimes were committed against postal employees between 2019 and 2024 in cities where PPOs are assigned, including:

- 607 attacks in 2023 alone — making it the most violent year on record.
- Robberies skyrocketed from 30 in 2019 to 235 in 2023 — a 683% explosion.
- Burglaries, once rare, soared from 4 in 2018 to 35 in 2024 — a 775% explosion.
- Homicides — though infrequent — occurred every single year.

This is not random crime. It is a clear and growing pattern of targeted violence against federal employees — and it is occurring in precisely the areas where uniformed postal police deterrence has been removed.

## **The Cities at Risk**

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report confirms the concentration of risk: from 2019 to 2023, there were 10,859 violent crimes against postal employees nationwide.<sup>2</sup> Of those, 2,705 occurred in the very cities with active postal police contingents — meaning 1 in 4 violent incidents against postal employees happened in the relatively few cities with a Postal Police presence.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20250617724938/en/The-AI-Paradox-Artificial-Intelligence-Supporting-Business-Growth-While-Fueling-Fraud>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106497.pdf>

This disproportionate share becomes even more striking when viewed alongside population data. PPO jurisdictions account for approximately 7% of the U.S. population — yet they accounted for over 25% of postal worker assaults and robberies. The cities with PPOs are Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Newark, Oakland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, San Juan, St. Louis, and Washington DC.

These are not marginal outposts. They are dense, high-volume delivery environments — urban zones with major infrastructure, a concentration of blue collection boxes, green relay boxes, apartment panels, business cluster box units, and tens of thousands of USPS delivery trucks which now amount to known vulnerabilities to organized mail theft. In these very cities, Postal Police Officers have been rendered useless to stop the mail theft crisis by an ill-advised USPIS policy choice. No law required the decision. No risk assessment or cost-benefit analysis justified it. And no oversight body, to include Congress, recommended it.

### **The Surge in Letter Carrier Robberies Was *PREVENTABLE***

For three consecutive years — 2020, 2021, and 2022 — the 21 cities that support a Postal Police Force were the epicenter of letter carrier robberies. Those 21 cities consistently accounted for *most* letter carrier robberies nationwide: 58% in 2020, 58.2% in 2021, and 43.6% in 2022. These were not isolated incidents — they were concentrated attacks in cities where a uniformed federal police force was already stationed but prohibited from acting. Even as mail theft expanded in 2023, more than one-third of all letter carrier robberies still occurred in these same cities — locations where Postal Police Officers were present but sidelined by policy, forced to watch a crisis unfold from the sidelines.

### **Letter Carrier Robberies: Year-by-Year Breakdown**

Year	Total Robberies (781% Surge)	Robberies in Cities with PPOs	Percentage
2019	73	30	41.1%
2020	150	87	58.0%
2021	261	152	58.2%
2022	472	206	43.6%
2023	643	235	36.5%

Despite clear geographic patterns and surging violence, USPIS inexplicably refused to adapt its crime prevention strategy. Rather than redeploying the Postal Police Force to deter attacks in the hardest-hit cities, USPIS doubled down on its passive, investigative approach — arriving after the crime occurred and hoping for leads. That failed USPIS model of reacting to crime has left letter carriers exposed, public confidence shaken, and criminal networks emboldened.

### **Project Safe Delivery: Rebranding Failure as Success**

In May 2023, USPIS launched “Project Safe Delivery.” Despite its glossy branding, Project Safe Delivery is less a law enforcement strategy than a public relations campaign designed to reassure rather than resolve. The Postal Inspection Service points to arrest numbers — “over 2,400 since launch” — leaving out the fact that most of those arrests were made by other agencies, not USPIS. Spread those 2,400 arrests across two years and 50 states and the truth is revealed: USPIS is only

averaging two mail theft arrests per state per month. Put another way, about one mail theft arrest per Postal Inspector per year — hardly a serious deterrence campaign.

Even if one generously assumes that all 2,400 arrests were made directly by USPS, which they were not — as Postal Inspectors routinely “claim” credit for arrests made by other agencies — the number still reflects a dramatic decline in effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, with Postal Police Officers still on patrol, USPS made over 5,000 mail theft arrests.<sup>45</sup> By 2018, that number dropped to nearly 2,500 mail theft arrests.<sup>6</sup> And by 2023 — despite mail theft reaching historic highs — arrests had plummeted to just over 1,300.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the surge in stolen arrow keys continues unabated. Arrow keys are master keys that open every blue collection box, neighborhood cluster box unit, green relay box and apartment panel in a Zip Code. A single stolen arrow key fuels long-term mail theft, check fraud, identity theft and other financially motivated crimes. These universal keys are not just opportunistic targets — they are the backbone of organized postal crime. Arrow Key thefts rose by **150%** from 1,374 in 2020<sup>8</sup> to 3,437 in 2024<sup>9</sup> — yet under Project Safe Delivery — only 183 keys were ever recovered, a dismal 5%. And even when a key is recovered, there is no way to determine how many counterfeit copies were forged and distributed.

USPS has also been touting an alleged 27% drop in letter carrier robberies — but without context, that number is deeply misleading. To reiterate, in 4 years, robberies of letter carriers have skyrocketed by 781%. A slight dip from an all-time high is not a sign of success — it is damage control, dressed up as progress.

USPS somehow credits the modest decline in carrier robberies to Project Safe Delivery. But a more credible explanation is far more troubling: criminal networks have simply adapted and evolved. Why risk a violent robbery of a letter carrier when you can: buy stolen or counterfeit arrow keys on the black market; bribe or collude with compromised postal employees; reverse-engineer keys from stolen locks; break into postal delivery vehicles; and/or harvest mail from the millions of unprotected neighborhood cluster box units across America.

What Project Safe Delivery offers in optics, it lacks in substance. There is no national deployment of visible postal police, no clear metrics for success, and no evidence of sustained operational impact. USPS press releases praise “partnerships” and “targeted enforcement,” but with mail theft still rising and carrier robberies only slightly declining from historic highs, the campaign is

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2021-10/21-099-R22.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://wayback.archive-it.org/org-652/20230414130713/https://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t5732010.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Written USPS policy requires that arrests made by PPOs be categorized as “assistance rendered to postal inspectors.”

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.uspis.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018-AR.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://prc.arkcase.com/api/prc-dockets/filing/downloadFile?fileId=197320>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.linns.com/news/us-stamps-postal-history/postal-inspection-service-numbers-confirm-sharp-rise-in-mail-thefts>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/investigations/thieves-target-usps-master-keys-mail-fraud-potential/85-9be66c21-c093-4e84-a4f4-5d76b80ff19b>

engineered to manage perception — not crime. Smart policing starts with prevention. Project Safe Delivery ends with a slogan.

### **USPIS Has No Method to Determine its Law Enforcement Needs**<sup>10</sup>

In 2000, the newly created USPS OIG reviewed the “Inspection Service Budget Process” and revealed that:

“Inspection Service management did not establish a process to determine annually whether the Inspection Service was operating under the appropriate staffing levels and mixture of positions, and whether staff was appropriately allocated among the headquarters and field operating units. [...] Significant changes have occurred that should have impacted Inspection Service personnel requirements and allocations resulting in the need for redeployment of personnel, such as: Creation of the Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG).”<sup>11</sup>

In 2003 — six years after the USPS OIG was created — the OIG found the exact same persistent USPIS inefficiencies when it issued audit report, “Postal Inspection Service Law Enforcement Staffing Requirements.”<sup>12</sup> The OIG reiterated that USPIS “did not have a formal internal process for determining its overall staffing complement.”

In 2006, the USPS Board of Governors approved the transition of ALL internal investigations from the Inspection Service to the USPS OIG. The OIG performed these functions with fewer people and at a lower cost.<sup>13</sup>

In effect, half of the work (i.e., audits and internal investigations) that were once performed by Postal Inspectors were now being performed by OIG Special Agents.

How did this dramatic transfer of work affect Postal Inspector staffing levels?

**Short answer — it didn’t.** The authorized complement of Postal Inspectors decreased by a paltry 11.7% from 1,990 in FY 2006 to 1,758 in FY 2007.<sup>14</sup> Remarkably, all the eliminated postal inspector positions were vacant and therefore, the onboard complement of Postal Inspectors remained unchanged.

Although the transfer of postal inspector work to the OIG had no operational impact on the uniformed Postal Police Force — USPIS gutted the authorized complement of PPOs by 36.5% from 1,303 in FY2006 to 828 in FY2007. After all, the Inspection Service had to show some cost savings after its investigative workload was cut in half — even if it came at the expense of the security of the U.S. Mail system and the protection of vulnerable letter carriers.

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<sup>10</sup> A more detailed account of USPIS waste and abuse can be found here: <https://www.fedweek.com/federal-managers-daily-report/the-troubled-history-of-waste-and-abuse-in-the-u-s-postal-inspection-service-doge-are-you-listening/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/OV-AR-00-005.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/SA-AR-03-004.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> OIG Management Advisory – Review of Postal Inspection Service Transition and Resources (Report Number SA-MA-07-002)

<sup>14</sup> IBID

In 2007, the OIG issued an audit report which assessed USPIS initiatives that stemmed from the creation of the USPS OIG “to determine whether appropriate savings were captured.”<sup>15</sup> To no one’s surprise, the OIG found that:

“The Postal Inspection Service did not realize all budget or staffing level reductions that should have resulted from Postal Service budget cuts, the transition of work to the OIG, and the reorganization to eliminate redundant functions.”

In 2024 — 25 years after the OIG initially discovered that USPIS lacked processes to determine “staffing levels and mixture of positions” — the GAO discovered the same persistent defect. More specifically, in May of 2024, the GAO issued a report which revealed that USPIS does not have a method in place to determine its law-enforcement staffing needs leaving the Postal Service exposed to criminal attack.<sup>16</sup>

The GAO found that the number of serious postal crimes — including burglaries, robberies, assaults, and homicides — increased almost every fiscal year between 2017 and 2023. The GAO said, “We chose 2017 because it captured case data before the Inspection Service issued a 2020 memo on postal police work occurring off USPS property.”

The GAO noted:

“Prior to 2020, Inspection Service divisions could assign postal police to patrols along carrier routes. For example, officials from another division we interviewed told us their postal police officers conducted targeted patrols along carrier routes where robberies had previously occurred or where crime was generally more prevalent.”

The GAO concluded that:

“USPS’s ability to meet its universal service obligation is due in large part to the efforts of its letter carriers delivering mail across the country, and their ability to do so safely. Given the recent upward trend in serious crime against USPS employees and property, ensuring that the Inspection Service aligns its law enforcement resources with security needs is increasingly important. . . fully documenting its processes for determining the size and location of its postal police workforce, including the factors considered in that process, would provide some assurances that decisions made aligned with agency needs.”

In other words — and consistent with the findings of the OIG made decades earlier — the size, placement, and responsibilities of the Postal Police Force are not based upon the law enforcement needs of the Postal Service.

While the GAO found that threats have shifted from postal facilities to letter carrier routes, the Inspection Service has done the opposite: reassigning Postal Police away from the streets and back into buildings, ignoring where the danger truly lies.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/SA-MA-07-002.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106497.pdf>

Perhaps even more remarkably, despite formally accepting all three of the GAO’s recommendations, USPS has failed to implement even one — more than a year later. In a recent interview with Raw Story — the GAO’s director of physical infrastructure, said:

“[USPIS] told us that they're going to identify metrics or factors that they'll consider when making workforce decisions, but that's the extent of the information that we have at this point from them. They've not given us any additional details or timeframes.”<sup>17</sup>

**A Uniformed Police Force Dismantled — During a Crime Surge**

During a time when every law enforcement agency in the country increased visible, uniformed patrols in response to rising crime, USPS did the exact opposite. In August 2020, USPS effectively benched its own federal police force by stripping PPOs of their patrol authority. Worse, since 2016, USPS has decimated the ranks of the Postal Police Force by over 33% — most aggressively beginning in 2020.

Instead of expanding its uniformed police presence amid escalating robberies and mail theft, USPS gutted its uniformed police force — leaving the most targeted ZIP Codes without a dedicated frontline defense. Even worse, USPS publicly declared it had “*comprehensively curtailed*” postal police patrol activity, effectively broadcasting to criminals that federal law enforcement was no longer on the streets. This reversal of standard policing strategies not only defied common sense but also left postal workers and infrastructure increasingly vulnerable to organized criminal exploitation.

**The Dismantling of Postal Police Force**

Fiscal Year	PPOs Nationwide
1974	2648
1986	1745
2002	1341
2008	869
2016	503
2018	487
2020	478
2022	402
2024	358
2025 (YTD)	333

Meanwhile, the Inspection Service has been sure to replenish the ranks of Postal Inspectors — the complement of which consistently remains at around 1,300. **For every Postal Inspector hired, the Postal Service could have hired two [2] PPOs at far less cost.**<sup>18</sup>

Unlike Postal Inspectors, PPOs focus on crime prevention and apprehension, not investigations. While Postal Inspectors work from the relative safety of their offices in postal facilities — or while

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.rawstory.com/raw-investigates/doge/>

<sup>18</sup> Postal Inspectors receive enhanced law enforcement pay and benefits such as locality pay; law enforcement availability pay; 20-year retirement with increased pension annuities, etc. — while PPOs receive none of this.



teleworking from the comfort of their homes — it was a PPO’s job to prevent postal crime. Unlike Postal Inspectors, PPOs are not accountants or investigators who show up well after a postal crime has been committed, and the scene has been secured.

### **The Limits of Reactive Policing: Lessons from Cybercrime**

Criminals build entire dark web marketplaces dedicated to trafficking stolen checks, original USPS arrow keys, and even high-quality counterfeit keys — all harvested from an overwhelmed and under-protected mail system. Unfortunately, when law enforcement takes down a fraud hub from the dark web, criminals do not vanish — they migrate. Research shows that vendors and buyers shift seamlessly to other platforms, with tightly connected markets quickly absorbing the disruption. The fraud ecosystem does not collapse; it reorganizes.

Consider the 2021 law enforcement takedown of “DarkMarket” — then one of the largest illegal fraud marketplaces. Despite the scale of the operation, vendor migration patterns revealed a swift and coordinated shift to alternate platforms. Within days, many of the same criminal actors were operating under the same usernames in new but familiar markets. In the end, the fraud ecosystem remained intact, with tightly connected markets absorbing displaced criminal activity.

This does not mean takedowns are meaningless. Takedowns matter in disrupting operations, scattering actors, and creating friction. But disruption alone is not a long-term strategy — it is a tactic. The modern fraud economy is too resilient, too decentralized, and too adaptive for reactive measures alone to succeed.

That is why proactive policing is essential: visible deterrence, predictive analysis and real-time disruption must accompany traditional investigations. Simply reacting after the damage is done, allows criminal networks to regroup, evolve, and strike again.

One of the most well-supported findings in criminology is that the certainty and celerity of punishment — not its severity — is a more effective deterrent to crime.<sup>19</sup> When mail thieves are caught in the act, pursued immediately, and taken into custody, it sends an unmistakable and powerful message: if you tamper with the mail, you will be seen, you will be stopped, and you will be arrested. It is that simple.

By contrast, the current USPIS law enforcement model relies on long-term, resource-draining investigations aimed at building cases against low-level suspects. Even when these investigations do lead to arrests — which most do not — they occur long after the fact, with no deterrent effect and no visible law enforcement presence to reassure the public or dissuade criminals.

Uniformed Postal Police patrols create immediate consequences. The Inspection Service’s passive, reactive approach creates criminal opportunity.

### **USPIS: Mismanagement and Mission Failure**

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<sup>19</sup> <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/five-things-about-deterrence>



The recent USPS OIG audit of the Inspection Service’s case management provides a devastating look at how the agency mismanages workhours — and, in doing so, fails its core mission: protecting the U.S. Mail, postal employees, and postal infrastructure.<sup>20</sup>

**FINDING #1: Half of Postal Inspector workhours went to “preliminary” area cases — most poorly documented, many unrelated to the mail.**

The OIG found that USPIS allocated 1.35 million of 2.52 million workhours (54%) to so-called “area cases”— preliminary investigations often opened without confirmed criminal activity. These area cases:

- Represented just 19% of total USPIS cases yet consumed over half of available workhours.
- Were intended to be early-stage inquiries but often lacked follow-through or closure.
- Included many investigations without a postal nexus or which duplicated efforts by the FBI, DEA, DHS, and other agencies.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, “jacketed cases”— which include confirmed crimes like mail theft and carrier assaults — received just 46% of inspector time.

**Translation:** USPIS is spending more time pursuing marginal or duplicative investigations than protecting the U.S. Mail.

**FINDING #2: 64% of Postal Inspector workhours have no supporting documentation.**

Of the 336,238 workhours sampled by the OIG: 216,749 hours — 64% — lacked even the most basic documentation (no field notes, no investigation logs), resulting in \$11.5 million per year in unsupported work: the equivalent of 104 full-time inspectors.

**FINDING #3: USPIS mismanagement is systemic — not an anomaly.**

- 59% of cases were not updated every six months as required.
- 48% did not submit required reports following major events.
- 32% of area cases were kept open beyond the three-year policy limit — sometimes indefinitely.

**The result:** USPIS has no meaningful way to evaluate productivity, assess case value, or confirm that inspectors are working on anything tied to their core mission.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.uspsoig.gov/reports/audit-reports/us-postal-inspection-service-area-case-management>

<sup>21</sup> For instance, in Report No. FF-AR-11-009 — the OIG found, “[T]he Postal Service commissioned an independent mission review study on the Postal Inspection Service’s programs and activities that identified a number of functions that Postal Service law enforcement personnel do not need to perform. It determined that nearly 40 percent of Postal Inspection Service investigations are not clearly aligned with the Postal Service but support other needs where benefits to the Postal Service are difficult to assess. These include investigations in mail fraud, money laundering, identity theft, child pornography, and administrative investigations. The report recommended the Postal Service, and the Postal Inspection Service clearly align priorities, including identifying programs that have a substantial connection to the mail.”

USPIS is legally mandated to protect letter carriers from armed robberies and the U.S. Mail from theft and tampering. But instead of focusing on these real, urgent threats, USPIS eliminated proactive Postal Police patrols and drifted into loosely defined investigations — many of which fall outside its core mission or replicate the work of other federal agencies.

**If even a fraction of these misused workhours had been invested in proven street-level prevention — specifically, deploying Postal Police Officers to patrol mail theft hotspots — the epidemic of mail theft, check fraud, and letter carrier robberies might have been curbed, if not prevented altogether.**

Instead, we are left with a federal law enforcement agency that:

- Cannot account for what it is actually doing.
- Wastes time and money duplicating the investigative work of other law enforcement agencies.
- Abandoned its core duty of protecting the U.S. Mail and postal workers by dismantling its own Postal Police Force.

### **A Solution Already Exists**

Postal Police Officers are:

- Already on the payroll
- Already trained and equipped.
- Already assigned to the most dangerous ZIP Codes.

No new funding is needed.<sup>22</sup> All that is missing is the will — and the policy — to let uniformed police officers do their jobs.

Yet USPIS is quietly dismantling the Postal Police Force through attrition, chronic under-hiring, and deliberate mismanagement. Just like the 2020 decision to sideline PPOs — made without a formal risk assessment or cost-benefit analysis — this current trajectory is a silent, unaccountable retreat from public and employee safety. The consequences are real: more stolen mail, more violence against postal workers, and more arrow keys vanishing into criminal networks.

The very police officers who could stop it are grounded. PPOs are federally empowered, fully trained and equipped, but are prohibited from stepping off USPS property.

At its core, this is about priorities. And the U.S. Postal Inspection Service has chosen to prioritize a petty labor dispute over the basic duty to protect the U.S. Mail.

Reform will not be easy, but it is long overdue. Americans deserve a U.S. Postal Inspection Service that is transparent, accountable, and effective — not one that deflects blame, delays action and denies reality verified by data. Should the status quo persist, mail theft will continue to surge, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service will continue to dismally fail.

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<sup>22</sup> The full and budgeted Postal Police complement currently stands at 702 officers.