



**STATEMENT OF  
CHICAGO EXECUTIVE POSTMASTER (A)  
EDDIE C. MORGAN, JR.  
before the  
House Committee on Oversight and Reform  
Subcommittee on Government Operations  
Field Hearing: “Waiting on the Mail: Postal Service Standard Drops  
in Chicago and the Surrounding Area”  
October 15, 2021**

Good morning Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, members of the subcommittee and Illinois delegation. Thank you for calling this important hearing to examine service performance in Chicago.

My name is Eddie C. Morgan, Jr. and I currently serve as Acting Executive Postmaster of Chicago, where I oversee nearly 4,000 employees, working at over 66 facilities, with 2,131 routes and servicing 1,314,091 delivery addresses. I have nearly 24 years' service as a postal employee and served four years in the United States Air Force just prior to joining the U.S. Postal Service.

Before assuming this assignment in June 2021, I served as Executive Postmaster of Kansas City, MO, and as the Manager of Post Office Operations in the Arizona District. I have extensive experience in customer service through various assignments in the Detroit, Arizona, and Mid-America Districts, and have served the American public in the roles of clerk, letter carrier, supervisor, manager, Postmaster, Executive Postmaster and Acting District Manager.

While long-standing external challenges such as harsh winters, increasing crime, and—since March 2020—the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to service performance issues in Chicago, in the just over 90-days that I have been in this position, I have taken actions to improve service performance and efficiencies. I remain committed to continuous improvement of customer service in the City of Chicago and I appreciate your support in these efforts.

### **OIG Audit of Mail Delivery and Customer Service Concerns**

As members of the congressional delegation are aware, the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) released its findings in an audit of the Auburn Park, Henry McGee, Ashburn, and James E. Worsham stations on February 1. The audit included findings of delayed mail, inaccurate reporting of mail conditions, improper scanning, and unsafeguarded assets. Illinois 1 District management agreed with the OIG's findings and the recommendations have been closed out. Nevertheless, we continue to monitor these activities and ensure processes are in place to mitigate any future occurrences.

### **Overview of Current Challenges**

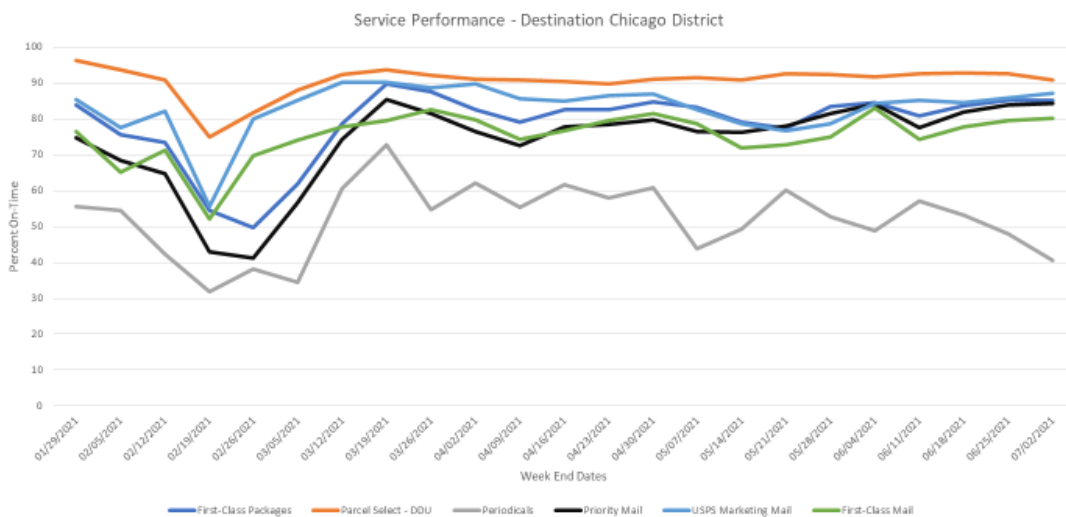
Several factors compounding over time have led to the current instability of the Chicago Post Office workforce and service performance. Street crime, including frequent assaults, robberies, and two carriers being shot, has raised understandable fear, leading to deficiencies in recruiting

and retaining workforce. Pandemic-related leave and other employee availability issues have further hampered the ability to achieve and maintain service excellence.

Chicago service performance was moving in the right direction at the beginning of 2021 until the record consecutive days of measurable snow fall and subzero temperatures hit the city beginning the week of January 23rd. The last week of January and first week of February saw two major snowstorms. In a 22-day span Chicago received over three feet of snow and set an all-time record for consecutive days of snow fall. The average yearly snow total in the city is 36 inches and the city received more than that in just those 22 days. Streets were not cleared and passable for five consecutive days and the mail processing plant had to warehouse mail during that time for several stations due to transportation having no access to the facility due to unpassable roads.

As illustrated in the trend chart below, service stabilized after these storms but again was impacted with the creation of Emergency Federal Employee Leave (EFEL) as part of the *American Rescue Plan Act* that began on March 12 and expired as a benefit on September 30.

### Service Performance Trend – Destination Chicago District



Date Range: 1/23/2021 to 7/2/2021. Scores for First-Class Mail/USPS Marketing Mail/Periodicals are not weighted.

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10/8/2021  
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While these factors have greatly impacted operations, the inconsistency of service performance is not acceptable. To this day, Chicago’s service performance is driven by areas of opportunity with complement, employee availability, daily management and oversight, as well as environmental factors such as weather and high crime rates.

## **Crime, Civil Unrest and Employee Safety**

As previously mentioned, and as will be referenced throughout this testimony, crime in the city has proven to be a pervasive challenge to our service and operations. The following are examples of various incidents that have impacted city service and understandably caused great concern among employees:

Carrier Shootings – We experienced 2 incidents of carrier shootings on March 27 and September 10, 2020. More recently, we had a near miss when a carrier’s dog spray canister deflected a bullet in the crossfire of a drive-by shooting.

Disruption Due to Civil Unrest – During the periods of May 29 – June 2, 2020, and August 9 – 10, 2020, we experienced significant service outages at 4 facilities (Fort Dearborn, Henry McGee, Wicker Park and Ogden Park) due to vandalism and property disruption. Furthermore, the flow of traffic from outlying areas was severely impeded, causing transportation challenges for employees.

Paint Ball Shootings – Recurrent attacks on letter carriers occurred between October 2019 and October 2020.

Additionally, 5 carriers were physically assaulted in November and December 2020, and among U.S. cities, in 2020, Chicago ranked second in dog attacks, with 59 carrier attacks. While the Postal Service trains every letter carrier on proper safety measures should they encounter a loose, stray or aggressive dog, we have no authority to address this concern short of changing the mode of delivery where problems persist.

One of the guiding principles of the Postal Service is that employees are our most valued resource. We are deeply committed to integrating safe work practices into all of our services and work to ensure that all employees are trained to perform their jobs safely and responsibly.

Violent crime and threats of violence against Postal Service employees are investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the law enforcement, crime prevention, and security arm of the Postal Service. Chicago area Postal Inspectors conduct violent crime and workplace violence prevention presentations to new employee orientations. Those presentations include prevention tips and what to do if an employee is victimized. The Inspection Service has a liaison position with the Chicago Police Intelligence Center (CPIC) and receives the Chicago Police Department’s Daily Awareness and Homeland Security Brief. Additionally, this liaison provides

real time information when incidents are occurring that may affect Postal Service operations or employee safety.

## **Employee Availability**

As in other parts of the country, City of Chicago offices continue to experience staffing shortages related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* and *Emergency Family Medical Leave Act* of 2020 provided postal employees with up to 80 hours of Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL), as well as expanded FMLA benefits to allow employees to take up to 12 weeks of leave for qualifying reasons from April 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020. Chicago employees used 129,022 hours of leave related to these acts, which equates to 16,129 lost workdays, impacting our holiday Peak season. This constituted 9.62 percent of such benefit usage in the entire Central Area.

More recently, the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* provided postal employees with up to 600 hours EFEL in response to the ongoing pandemic. The law was enacted with the understandable consequence that employee availability would be affected, particularly for federal agencies. Since the passage of the Act, the City of Chicago has used 197,248 hours, which equates to 24,656 lost workdays and makes up 16.42 percent of the EFEL usage in the entire Central Area.

Under federal law and our collective bargaining agreements, positions held by those on leave are reserved for the eventual return of absent employees, and limits on the size of our workforce mean that the necessary work must be absorbed by the remaining employees. Periods of high employee absences impact operations as managers and supervisors work to balance available employee workhours with operational demands.


We have seen an improvement in attendance since the expiration of the EFEL benefit. Nevertheless, we continue to struggle with commitments from our new hires and even some career employees who refuse to deliver in certain zones within the City of Chicago due to violent crime. While the city's level of authorized positions is at an acceptable level to match the daily workload (and on some days, surpasses the need), daily employee availability remains a key issue challenging our ability to achieve consistent on-time delivery for the 1.3 million addresses we serve.

In order to balance the work and provide timely delivery during these periods of high employee absence, we shifted our workforce daily to assist the offices most impacted and reduce the number of addresses not served. All available employees were authorized to work overtime and potentially seven days per week. Alternative assignments and schedules were offered for those with restrictions (roughly 269 carriers injured/unavailable). While we are currently better

staffed, we are prepared to make similar adjustments as needs arise in the current COVID environment.

To further the stabilization efforts, employees with high potential for management positions have also been identified to oversee the station-level execution of service teams and support skill development while we continue the hiring process to fill 27 vacant station manager and supervisor positions.

Chicago city carrier employee availability began steadily improving from April through August 2021, when it peaked at 71.61 percent average monthly availability. September's average daily availability was 70.76 percent through month's end. Working within our collective bargaining agreements, district and unit management have taken appropriate, progressive administrative actions for individuals with high unscheduled absences. Chicago has experienced a 12.79 percent improvement in the number of employees with high unscheduled absences since July. Monthly carrier availability trends are highlighted below.

City Carrier Employee Availability:	April	May	June	July	August	September	Trend	Qtr 3 Total	Qtr 4 Total
Chicago	66.23%	65.79%	68.67%	69.97%	71.61%	70.76%		66.89%	70.78%

### Retaining an Appropriate Employee Complement

Our ability to recruit and hire new employees has been hindered by episodes of criminal activity and unrest in certain parts of the city. Facing a low applicant pool, the Illinois 1 District reached out to district congressional offices and city aldermen for help promoting job opportunities through their media networks. We are thankful for the efforts of our elected officials, which have often resulted in significantly increased applicant pools. Our local officials' continued support for staffing remains an active need.

We have additionally faced problems with retention between the time applicants accept a job and the time they complete carrier academy. Once in the 4-day academy, new hires may find the job different than they anticipated and some face challenges with the driver training, due to limited driving experience. The table below demonstrates the past year's turnover.

Chicago Post Office City Carrier Assistant Attrition													
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	YTD Total
Total Rate	1.50%	0.80%	1.60%	2.70%	1.90%	2.30%	2%	4.30%	10.10%	21%	10.80%	5.80%	60.30%
Total Separated	11	6	12	21	13	17	15	32	70	131	60	33	421
Total on Rolls	745	715	773	768	699	745	764	744	690	623	553	565	699
Chicago Post Office	1.50%	0.80%	1.60%	2.70%	1.90%	2.30%	2.00%	4.30%	10.10%	21%	10.80%	5.80%	

Since my arrival in June, we have engaged a local expert to handle all hiring aspects for the City of Chicago and have hired 243 city carrier assistants (CCAs) and postal support employees (PSEs). These are non-career representatives of our workforce who perform the same duties as city carriers and retail or distribution clerks. By the end of the year, we are projecting to hire 180 additional CCAs and 68 PSEs in the City of Chicago to meet contingencies.

A Central Area complement taskforce meets multiple times a week to assess the overall complement availability of the Illinois 1 District, which includes Chicago. Additionally, a joint Headquarters and National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) taskforce subcommittee was assembled to assess and address the overall complement availability. Through the combined efforts of this taskforce, the process of hiring additional pre-career employees will continue into next year.

We are working collaboratively with the NALC to create reserve carrier assignments, which will be used to cover for regularly scheduled days off for some regular carriers. Human Resources has also put in new administrative processes to provide oversight for hiring and onboarding employees to better manage complement. We have also added facilities to assist in training new employees.

## **Employee Development**

One of the immediate changes I implemented since my start in June was establishing daily cadence calls with Senior Operating Managers to drive service performance throughout the city and build skill sets. This is a coaching and teaching opportunity to increase the knowledge of the city-wide management team.

In July of this year, we held Supervisor Summer School to develop our new leaders. Our supervisors handle the day-to-day instructions of our craft employees and our average supervisor has less than 20 months of experience in management. While this is a current challenge it also demonstrates that the foundation is set and we are building upon it.

I have also held in-person trainings for all supervisors and managers when any new internal dashboard is launched, directed high performing managers to establish a bench capable of performing their duties, and supported peer-to-peer coaching.

Just this week, as a part of a new Central Area initiative, high performing managers from various districts will be paired for 60 days with managers in Chicago who are new to their position or identified as under-performers, to help them develop the skills and processes

necessary to become high-functioning leaders. Those district mentors will continue to be a resource to participating Chicago managers after the 60-day period.

### **Adjusting Carrier Start Times**

To further improve efficiency, in September, the City of Chicago management team adjusted letter carrier start times to align with mail availability and to provide increased and more reliable service. The adjustment is consistent with the Postal Service acting as a responsible employer that prudently matches our workforce to an evolving workload and modifies staffing continuously.

It is important to clarify that this change was based on analysis of when mail was arriving at each unit, and start times were individually adjusted in accordance with those arrival times. There was no unmeasured broad stroke approach. On average, start times were adjusted by 30 to 45 minutes. Before the adjustments, carriers were reporting to the office before the last dispatch arrived from mail processing plants for delivery. At no fault of their own, the carriers simply had no work to perform during this waiting period.

I want to stress that a later start time does not equate to later delivery times. In fact, what this change has done is to allow for better efficiencies as the Postal Service adjusts to the nation's changing mail mix that has resulted in a significant increase in package volume since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The morning dispatches received at delivery units from processing plants are comprised primarily of packages. Since implementation of the later start times, we have seen carriers returning from their routes at the same time of day as compared to when they reported to work earlier, while providing more consistent delivery to our customers.

On average, the City of Chicago has more efficiently used more than eight hundred hours per day with the adjusted start time. The start time shift has allowed those hours to move from non-delivery hours to delivery to the citizens of Chicago, thereby improving service.

### **Improving Facility Maintenance**

In response to both employee and customer concerns we have also taken steps to improve exterior and interior facility maintenance. We have hired a contracted team to beautify grounds and clean interiors until we have staff available to fill 17 custodial vacancies. This hiring process is underway.



## **Improving Customer Retail Experience**

To drive better retail employee behavior and image, I established a retail customer experience recognition program. This initiative reinforces national customer retail experience goals and expectations.

I have also mandated that employees wear uniforms to maintain the brand and reinforce public trust.

## **Communications and Outreach**

### Efforts to Improve Customer Communications

Consumer Advisory Councils (CACs) were reestablished to connect customers with their local office. The most recent meeting was led by the Southwest Chicago Customer Service Operation Manager on September 24 via Zoom. Three CACs are currently up and running and we have the goal to expand to at least one CAC for each alderman's area.

To better and more accurately respond to customer inquiries, I have instructed our team to reach out to the customer, via his or her preferred method of contact, within two hours of receiving the inquiry. This allows us to fully understand the concern, take the appropriate steps to resolve it, and follow up as needed.

### Congressional Outreach

Area and District leadership has ongoing communication with elected officials regarding constituent concerns.

The Illinois 1 District meets with the congressional delegation and local aldermen once per quarter. Outside of our quarterly meetings, communication is often weekly and at times daily depending on the issue(s).

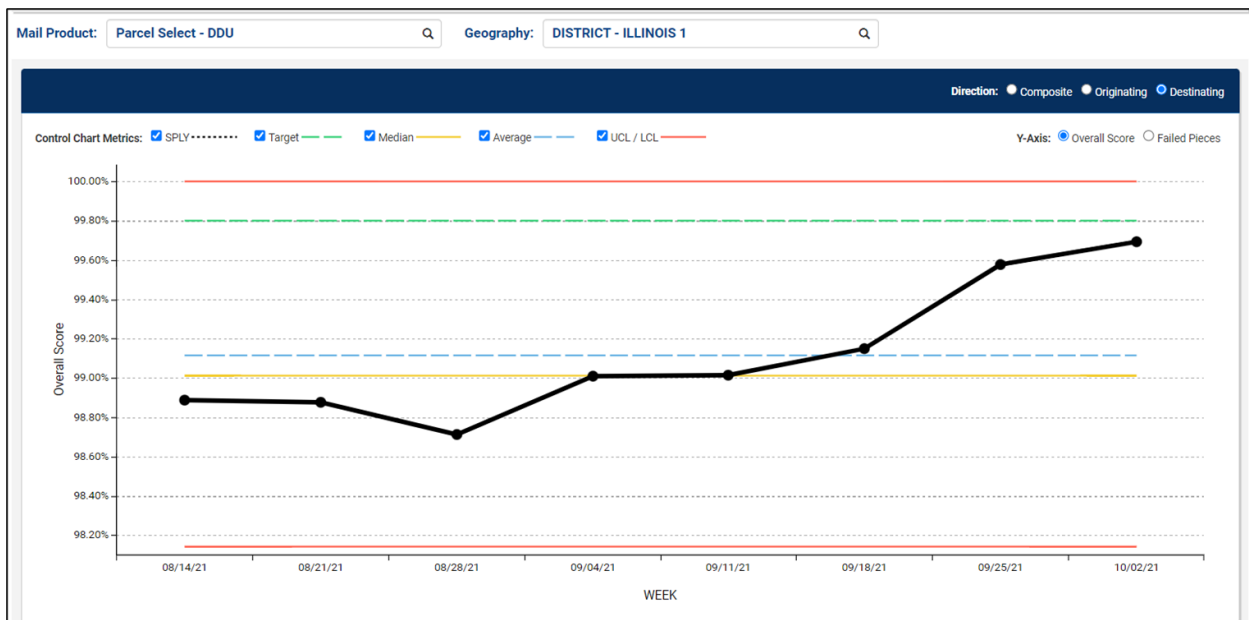
District leadership also has consistent discussions with representatives of the 51 elected aldermen to understand community concerns and interests.

## Overall Service Improvements

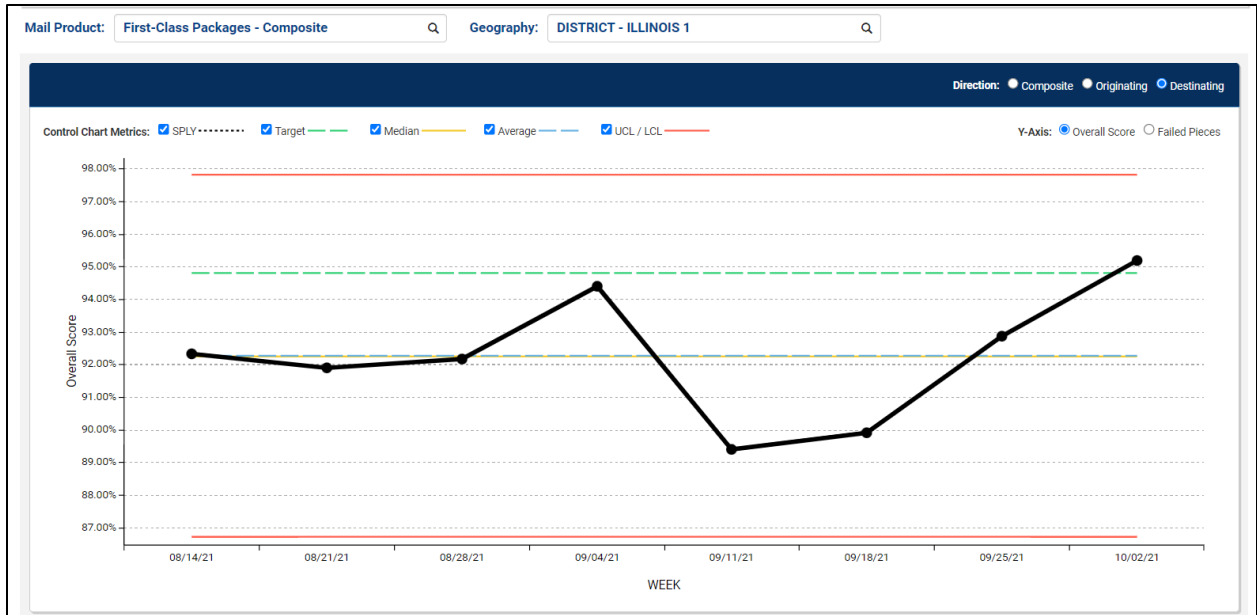
We are leveraging tools and technology, including various internal dashboards, coupled with customer inquiries gathered through our web-based customer contact interface for added visibility to daily delivery services. Customer service inquiries declined nearly 40 percent from April 2021 through the end of September 2021.

We started to see a stabilization in our service trends during the second week of September due to several factors mentioned above. Employee availability began improving with the impending expiration of EFEL and the continued hiring of new CCAs. The new carrier start time changes also had a positive impact on our service performance. By capturing inefficient hours lost in the office and moving those to productive hours on the street, we saw more mail being delivered timely, with no increase of carriers on the street in the evening.

Another factor in driving the improved service is Illinois 1 District's daily cadence discussions on failure root causes and the actions taken to eliminate the failures. Data trends for mail destinating into Chicago for the past eight weeks demonstrating improved service across all product areas since mid-September are illustrated below.



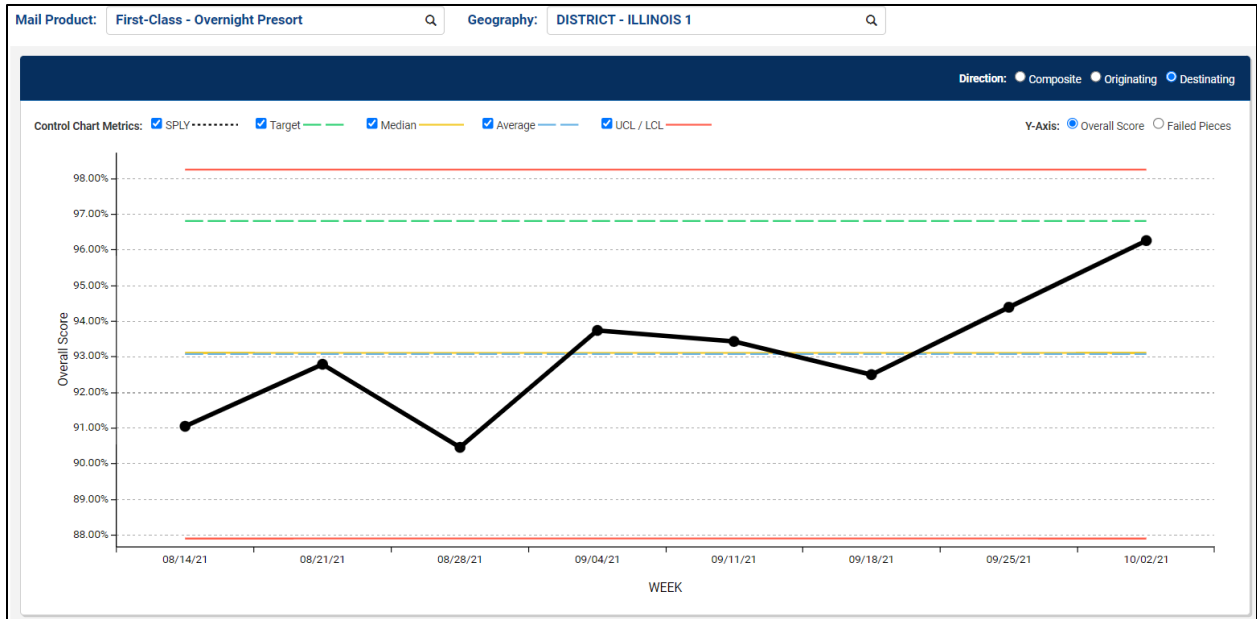
\* Parcel Select is the Postal Service's economical ground delivery service for packages entered in bulk, including those entered at destination facilities (last mile delivery).



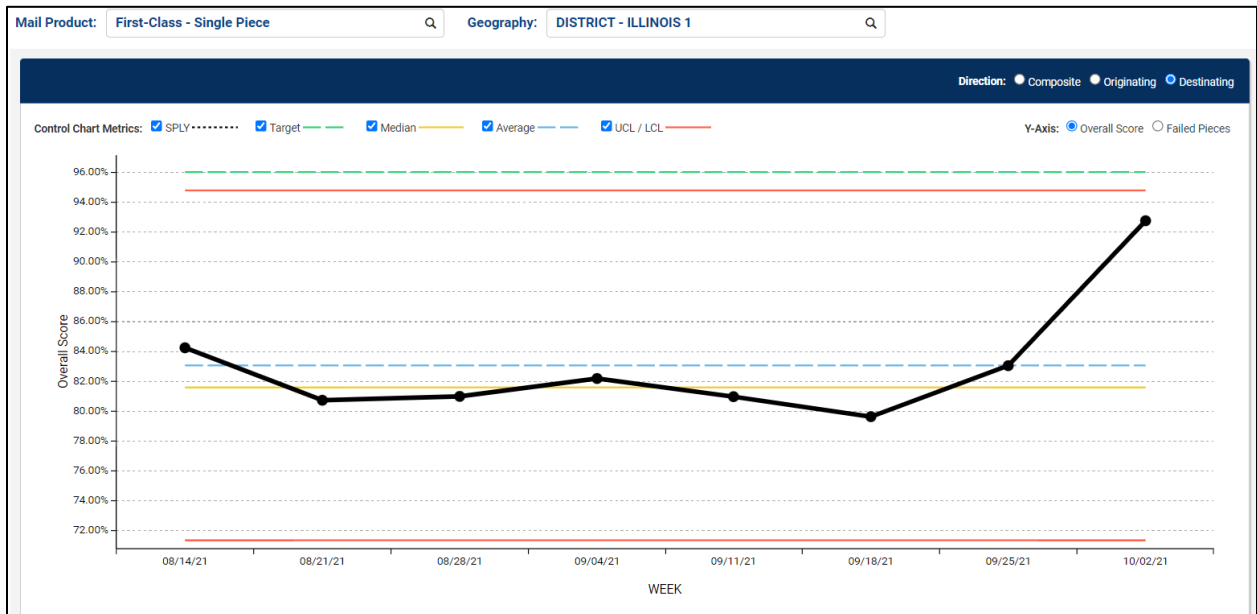
\* First-Class Packages received at a delivery unit in the morning are due for delivery that same day.



\* Priority Mail 1-day surface represents pieces sent Chicagoland to Chicagoland (example: ZIP Codes 606 to 601, 604 to 601, 601 to 601). All Priority Mail (Overnight/2Day/3Day) sent to a delivery unit must be delivered that day.



\* First-Class Mail Overnight Presort is presorted by the mailer originating and destinating within a Sectional Center Facility (ZIP Codes 601 to 601 only). When mailers tender to plant by 8:00 a.m. – it is due for delivery next day.



\* First-Class Mail Single Piece is deposited in blue collection boxes. Pieces going from ZIP Code 601 to 601 receive 2-day delivery (i.e.: if cancelled on Monday, due for delivery Wednesday).

## **Conclusion**

While I have only served the City of Chicago for a short time, please know I am committed to providing high quality, reliable service to our residents. As noted above, we have seen service performance improvement over the last eight weeks as a result of the processes we have established, and we will continue to refine those processes as any new challenges arise.

Thank you, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I welcome any questions that you or members of the Illinois delegation have.