



**STATEMENT OF**

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**Inspector in Charge**

**before the**

**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

**Subcommittee on Government Operations**

**“An Update on Mail Theft and Crime”**

**United States House of Representatives**

**July 23, 2025**

## Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Mfume, and Members of the Committee. I appreciate your interest in understanding the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's role and exploring ways to protect postal employees and ensure and strengthen our nation's mail security. The United States Postal Service, through the Postal Inspection Service, has been and will continue to be committed to taking all practicable measures to protect postal employees, to ensure the security of our nation's mail, and to provide the American public the best, most efficient postal service possible. I especially appreciate the opportunity to speak to you as the Postal Service celebrates its 250th anniversary this week.

My name is Brendan Donahue, and I am an Inspector in Charge for the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the law enforcement, crime prevention, and security arm of the United States Postal Service. In this role, I provide executive leadership for domestic, global, and national security. The Postal Inspection Service is composed of our national headquarters here in Washington, DC, 16 field divisions, two service centers, a national training academy, and a national forensic laboratory. These installations are staffed by over 1,250 postal inspectors, nearly 350 Postal Police officers, and more than 600 support personnel. The Postal Inspection Service protects over 600,000 Postal Service employees at more than 31,000 facilities, with over 250,000 vehicles, and 120,000 blue collection boxes, delivering to over 168 million delivery points across the country.

Unlike other members of federal law enforcement, the Postal Inspection Service does not rely on congressionally appropriated funds for its operations. We are funded primarily by the Postal Service, which generally receives zero tax dollars and must rely solely on the sale of postage, products, and services to fund our day-to-day operations.

The Postal Inspection Service is the oldest federal law enforcement entity in the United States, predating the Declaration of Independence by nearly a year. In 1775, William Goddard was appointed as a "surveyor" by the Second Continental Congress to complete a wide swath of duties, including establishing new Post Offices, arranging mail transportation contracts, and settling postmasters' accounts. Throughout our proud history, we have investigated train robberies, escorted the Hope Diamond on its journey through the U.S. Mail to the Smithsonian, brought the perpetrator of the original Ponzi scheme to justice, combatted child exploitation, and fought on the front lines of the opioid epidemic by removing hundreds of thousands of pounds of illicit narcotics from the mailstream. While our tactics have changed over the past 250 years, the Postal Inspection Service's mission to support and protect the Postal Service and its employees, infrastructure, and customers remains steadfast.

In my testimony, I will offer details of the Postal Inspection Service's efforts to combat the increasingly complex networks of criminals seeking to exploit the mail system. I will touch on several areas of concern, including mail theft, and discuss how we are addressing postal crime through our comprehensive Project Safe Delivery crime prevention initiative.

### **Postal Theft**

I share the concerns that many of the members of this subcommittee have expressed about the increase and change in nature of crime over the past several years, particularly the escalating criminal incidents against Postal Service employees and the mail. Every postal employee deserves to work in a safe environment, free from being targeted by criminals who seek to exploit the mail for criminal gain. The public should also trust that their mail and packages will reach their intended destination safely and securely.

I am also aware that the Postal Service does not exist in a bubble. We operate in every community in America, and since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, crimes against our employees and mail theft have increased, much like other crimes across various business sectors and communities.

Beginning around 2020 and peaking in 2023, the Postal Service experienced a 139% increase in reports of high-volume mail theft from mail receptacles, with 20,574 reports in FY 2019 and 49,146 reports in FY 2023. This significant increase in theft from mail receptacles, primarily due to financially motivated crimes like check fraud, was driven by organized criminal groups who shifted their focus from high-risk, high-reward crimes towards the perpetration of low-risk, high-reward financial crimes, as revealed by Postal Inspection Service investigations, Department of Treasury data, and financial industry sources. Word spread on the dark web, via encrypted messaging, and on social media. As criminals gained increased awareness of the amount of financial information contained in the mail, more sophisticated networks developed to perpetrate financial crimes utilizing stolen mail.

This increase is likely due to a number of factors, including mass pandemic relief fraud perpetrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, cyber-enabled techniques that facilitate the perpetration of financial crime, and a lax prosecutorial climate for property and financial crimes in some U.S. jurisdictions.

Prior to 2020, mail theft from mail receptacles (typically the Postal Service's blue collection boxes) was primarily perpetrated through forced entry or devices used to fish out the mail. Beginning around FY 2020, the Postal Service experienced an 845% increase in letter carrier robberies in a four-year span, with 64 letter carrier robberies in FY 2019 and 606 letter carrier robberies in FY 2023. Robbers often targeted letter carriers for arrow keys, which unlock arrow locks, an antiquated locking mechanism, to gain access to mail receptacles. Blue collection boxes and other mail receptacles remain an attractive target for criminals who seek to exploit design vulnerabilities.

### **Project Safe Delivery**

The Postal Service launched "Project Safe Delivery" to address this significant increase in mail theft and robberies of letter carriers and other postal crime. Project Safe Delivery seeks to *protect* postal

employees and the mailstream, *prevent* incidents through education and awareness, and *enforce* the laws that protect our employees and the nation's mail.

Project Safe Delivery represents the first time we've taken a Postal Service enterprise-wide, comprehensive approach to address letter carrier safety and mail theft. Multiple departments within the Postal Service, including the Postal Inspection Service, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and the Office of the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer, are working together to support the ongoing campaign.

Much as the Postal Service is investing to address deferred maintenance in its processing, logistics, and delivery operations, the Postal Service is investing to protect the mail system as a whole. This holistic approach includes investments to improve the physical security of mail receptacles, increase awareness among Postal Service employees on how to remain safe while at work, educate the public about ways to better protect their mail, and deploy high-impact investigations into attacks on Postal Service employees and associated mail theft.

The initiative is already showing results. While efforts are ongoing and continuously evolving, the period from May 2023 to the end of FY 2024 has already yielded significant outcomes for Project Safe Delivery. From the beginning of FY 2023 to the end of FY 2024, USPS letter carrier robberies decreased 27%, and this downward trend continues. Some other successes include:

- 16 enforcement surges completed in 10 cities, leading to arrests and more than 1,500 investigative actions.
- 32% more arrests for robberies of Postal Service employees in FY 2024 than the previous year.
- More than 23,000 high-security blue collection boxes installed nationwide.
- Replacement of more than 42,000 antiquated arrow locks with electronic locks.
- Increased monetary rewards to bring criminals to justice.

### **Protect: Employees and the Mailstream**

There has been an increase in letter carrier robberies nationwide where criminals are targeting letter carriers for their arrow keys, which can be used to access collection boxes, outdoor parcel lockers, and cluster box units. As the capabilities of these keys, once closely guarded, spread via social media, encrypted chat applications, and even via traditional media, their monetary value grew astronomically in criminals' hands. Criminals acquire these arrow keys to steal mail from secure mail receptacles to commit financial crimes, including altering stolen checks to commit check fraud.

To improve employee safety and mitigate arrow key risk, we are moving from antiquated technologies and upgrading to more secure blue collection boxes. The Postal Service has installed over 44,000 new electronic locks in an effort to devalue the arrow keys. These new locks require two-factor authentication, meaning that arrow keys alone will be less valuable to criminals, decreasing the motivation to target mail carriers.

The Postal Service has also deployed more than 23,000 high-security collection boxes to areas with greater security risks; more will be deployed this fiscal year. These high-security boxes feature several cutting-edge features to prevent a variety of mail theft methods, such as brute force attacks and “mail fishing.”

We are also protecting our employees and mail with our Next Generation Delivery Vehicles that will be deployed on many of America’s streets. This new fleet was developed to include advanced safety features for our employees and to better safeguard the mail that they transport.

### **Prevent: Incidents Through Education and Awareness**

The Postal Inspection Service continues to undertake a robust educational campaign to combat mail theft and improve employee safety. For example, stand-up talks educate employees on safety, mail theft awareness and prevention, and arrow key security. We also regularly share prevention messaging to customers through various sources like social media, public service announcements, and Informed Delivery.

Customers who believe they are victims of mail theft should report it immediately by submitting an online complaint at [www.uspis.gov/report](http://www.uspis.gov/report) or calling 877-876-2455 (and saying “theft” when prompted). We also encourage postal customers to call postal inspectors if they notice something unusual, like damage to their mail receptacle or neighborhood collection box. If a customer sees someone stealing mail, committing a postal-related crime, or following their letter carrier, they should immediately call the police, then report it to the Postal Inspection Service.

The Postal Inspection Service will continue community engagement efforts with local and state law enforcement to identify trends, enforce the law, amplify messaging, and implement targeted prevention activities in areas experiencing high levels of postal crime.

### **Enforce: The Laws that Protect the Nation's Mailstream**

The Postal Inspection Service is prioritizing robbery and mail theft investigations, with an increased focus on cyber-enabled financial crime associated with mail theft and carrier robberies. The Postal Inspection Service is also deploying postal inspectors and other personnel to areas with high rates of postal crime. It is important to note that areas with high postal crime do not always map exactly to areas with high crime in general.

Since the start of Project Safe Delivery in 2023, we have conducted 16 enforcement surge operations in 10 major metros across the nation. Each operation used wide-ranging law enforcement partnerships with the Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Postal Service Office of the Inspector General (USPS OIG), other federal agencies, and local law enforcement. During these surge operations, postal inspectors conducted investigative actions, including the execution of arrests and other court-authorized law

enforcement and prevention activities, as well as presentations to postal employees on employee safety and mail theft prevention.

We are also performing a comprehensive review of how we deploy our postal inspectors and Postal Police officers across the nation. Our goal is to ensure that we have the right personnel in the right places, enabling us to better investigate crime, secure our network, and protect our employees.

### **Other Project Safe Delivery Initiatives**

#### **Increased Monetary Rewards**

In August 2023, we updated the monetary reward program for information leading to the identification, arrest, and prosecution of those who commit crimes against the Postal Service, its employees, and the mailstream. A reward of up to \$150,000 is now available for anyone who can provide information on the robbery of a letter carrier (up from \$50,000) and \$100,000 for information on individuals who steal U.S. Mail (up from \$10,000). These updated rewards reflect the seriousness of crimes against postal employees and the U.S. Mail and will assist both prevention and enforcement efforts.

#### **Illegal Narcotics**

The Postal Inspection Service works aggressively to prevent the flow of opioids and other illicit drugs and contraband through the mailstream. As part of this effort, the Postal Inspection Service has developed tools to identify those who attempt to hide behind the secrecy of the dark web and cryptocurrency to misuse the postal network.

#### **Treasury Check Theft**

The Postal Inspection Service works with our federal law enforcement partners to crack down on the concerning theft of Department of the Treasury (Treasury) disbursement checks. We continue to work to catch not only those who steal the physical checks, but also the middlemen using encrypted messaging services to sell the contraband and enable the fraud. Protecting concentrations of these checks as they flow through our facilities is also an important role performed by our uniformed Postal Police officers, who patrol the 33 postal facilities with the largest concentrations of mail and employees.

Beginning September 30, 2025, all federal payments that are currently made by paper checks — including Social Security benefits, tax refunds, and vendor payments — will be made electronically by default, due to Executive Order 14247. This will reduce the number of checks in the mail system.

### **Law Enforcement Partnerships**

The Postal Inspection Service works closely with other federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities to share intelligence, coordinate cases, and conduct joint enforcement operations. When an investigation involves Postal Service employee misconduct, we work with our counterparts at the U.S.

Postal Service Office of Inspector General. The USPS OIG is responsible for investigating any complaints of internal mail theft, narcotics infractions, fraud, or misconduct committed by postal employees or contractors.

In addition to the USPS OIG, relationships with partners such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the DOJ, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) allow the Postal Inspection Service to better advance its mission to enforce the laws that defend the nation's mail.

I am aware that some members of Congress have expressed concern over the Postal Inspection Service's recent participation in the Department of Homeland Security's task force to combat drug trafficking, money laundering, weapons trafficking, human trafficking, alien smuggling, homicide, extortion, kidnapping, child exploitation, and other transnational crimes. The Postal Inspection Service has participated in such task forces for decades to investigate postal-related crimes. Our participation in this particular DHS task force does not reflect a new or unusual law enforcement collaboration.

Contrary to media reports, the Postal Service has not provided the Department of Homeland Security with direct access to any system, database, or records for the purpose of immigration enforcement.

Information in possession of the Postal Service is provided to other law enforcement agencies only upon request as authorized by law and in accordance with all applicable statutes, regulations, and policies. It was, in fact, unfortunate that media reports took the journalistic approach of listing systems that happen to exist at the Postal Service and made the false suggestion by inference that they were accessed for our work with the task force.

Joint investigations between the Postal Inspection Service and other law enforcement agencies, including those investigating immigration matters, would be tied to the criminal use of the mail, such as for drug, firearm, and human trafficking. Postal inspectors are not authorized to enforce immigration laws under Title 8 of the United States Code.

The Postal Inspection Service also employs state and local law enforcement officers as task force officers (TFOs). TFOs are force multipliers and allow postal inspectors to share intelligence data in real time with our state and local law enforcement partners. We have deputized over 170 local law enforcement officers to serve as TFOs, and we are seeking to add more. These TFOs put postal inspectors and our local law enforcement partners together to tackle postal-related crimes. Having TFOs fosters interagency cooperation and brings together a diverse skillset that enhances investigations. It also allows for intelligence to be shared, to tackle complex criminal investigations. TFOs also help enhance our community impact on a local level, when investigating carrier robberies, mail theft, and narcotics trafficking. We are seeing it over and over in the past few years: criminals who are robbing letter carriers for access to steal mail are also involved in other local crimes that negatively impact public safety in local

communities. The local expertise of TFOs, together with our knowledge of postal offenses and federal authority, results in increased public safety in our communities, which makes communities safer for our letter carriers while they are delivering.

You will undoubtedly hear a call today for the Postal Inspection Service to have our Postal Police officers (PPOs) patrol neighborhoods across the nation in an effort to thwart mail theft and prevent robberies. This is where our partnerships with state and local law enforcement come into play. These state and local law enforcement officers are in the best position to conduct neighborhood patrols and, indeed, already do so across the nation. Postal inspectors regularly engage with local and state law enforcement officers to increase their awareness of postal crime. Postal inspectors coordinate with our law enforcement partners and regularly conduct surveillance and appropriate enforcement actions in areas where high numbers of letter carrier robberies and mail thefts have been reported.

PPOs do not conduct patrols away from Postal Service real property, due to legal and practical reasons. First, from a jurisdictional perspective, PPOs do not have authority to enforce federal law off Postal Service property. The relevant statute, 18 U.S.C. 3061(c)(1), provides that “[t]he Postal Service may employ police officers for duty in connection with property owned or occupied by the Postal Service, or under the charge and control of the Postal Service, and persons on that property, including duties in areas outside the property to the extent necessary to protect the property and persons on the property.” Congress codified this language in 2006, as section 1001 of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, or PAEA. In 2020, a federal court confirmed, in response to the PPOs’ contrary assertions, that the Postal Service’s determination of PPOs’ jurisdiction constituted a reasonable interpretation of the law.

On July 14, 2025, the Postal Service’s interpretation of the statute was again upheld in federal court.

Second, from a more practical perspective, we also question the effectiveness or appropriateness of expanding the role of PPOs beyond the protection of real property, given the structure of the Postal Inspection Service and the fact that our state and local partners are best aligned for this mission. Given that there are over 230,000 postal delivery routes, it would not be practicable, cost-effective, or even logical to patrol every route. The Postal Inspection Service is made up of three categories of employees: (1) postal inspectors; (2) professional, technical, and administrative employees; and (3) PPOs. Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. 3061 (a) and (b), postal inspectors are federal agents charged with investigating any crimes with a Postal Service nexus regardless of location, including mail theft and robberies occurring outside of Postal Service real property. Professional, technical, and administrative employees provide investigative and administrative support for postal inspectors. PPOs are uniformed officers stationed at facilities with many employees, contractors, and customers, and that offer various services or contain large amounts of mail. PPOs play a vital role in protecting the people, mail, and facilities on those properties, but as noted, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. 3061 (c)(1), that role is legally limited to law enforcement activity on postal premises.



Even if PPOs had jurisdiction off of Postal Service property, relocating these officers from Postal Service property, as suggested by some, would not only jeopardize the security of the postal facilities but also pose a risk to the employees and customers who utilize these facilities daily. PPOs are assigned to certain facilities because the Postal Inspection Service has determined that these facilities require the presence of uniformed, trained, and armed officers. At those facilities, PPOs enforce order and act as a deterrent to criminals or employees who may wish to compromise the U.S. Mail or potentially harm the people inside.

### **Other Partnerships**

The Postal Inspection Service strategically employs Special Assistant U.S. Attorneys (SAUSAs) to enhance the availability of prosecutorial resources directed towards postal-centric cases. The SAUSAs provide a focused application of resources, attention, and expertise to the prosecution of postal-related crimes. We are currently funding 19 SAUSA positions across the country to help ensure that postal-related crimes are zealously and diligently prosecuted. We appreciate the cooperation of our counterparts at the DOJ, whom we depend upon to pursue these cases and bring perpetrators of crimes against the U.S. Mail to justice.

The Postal Inspection Service announced a joint effort to combat the rapid rise in check fraud with the American Bankers Association in March 2024. This anti-check-fraud initiative focuses on four main areas: educating Postal Service and bank customers about check fraud and what they can do to protect themselves; addressing money mules and collusive accountholders; collaborating with law enforcement; and training bank employees and postal workers on red flags and prevention. Since the announcement, multiple educational products and training sessions have been released as part of this partnership.

In February of this year, we announced a partnership with the Independent Community Bankers of America (ICBA) to combat the threat of check fraud. As part of this initiative, the Postal Inspection Service and ICBA will deliver in-branch educational materials with step-by-step instructions to help consumers safeguard their financial assets and how to respond if they experience check fraud.

### **Challenges**

The Postal Inspection Service takes seriously its role to safeguard America's postal system and will continue to aggressively pursue perpetrators who use the U.S. Mail system to further their illegal activity. We work to the best of our ability to carry out our mission but face a number of challenges that, if resolved, could enhance our ability to protect postal employees and the nation's mailstream.

As federal law enforcement, we seek to enforce the nearly 200 federal statutes that protect the Postal Service, our employees, and the mailstream. Our primary avenue for prosecution is with the DOJ, and we seek to maintain quality working relationships with all the U.S. Attorney's Offices across the nation. In some areas of the country, however, DOJ has limited prosecutive resources dedicated to these issues,

and federal prosecutors seek high monetary losses not normally associated with mail theft before accepting a case for prosecution and issuing postal inspectors legal processes to further their cases, as mentioned above.

Another challenge has been the lack of consequences that mail thieves and other postal offenders face once convicted, federally, for their crimes. One example was a subject arrested in possession of two postal keys, who stole mail on at least eight occasions and was found with over 3,000 pieces of stolen mail, USPS mail tubs, and checks and money orders with a face value of over \$1.5 million dollars. This subject pleaded guilty to theft of mail in late 2024 and was sentenced earlier this month to six months of home detention, three years of probation, and community service. In another example, last year a subject who held a gun to the head of a letter carrier and threatened to shoot during a robbery was sentenced to only thirty days in prison. Sentences like these do little to deter these crimes and make prosecuting them even more difficult.

While we seek to prosecute postal-related offenses through the federal court system, not every offense rises to the threshold of federal prosecution. When this occurs, postal inspectors also bring state charges against criminals who commit postal offenses. The challenge then becomes a patchwork of state laws across the nation that vary in their ability to deal with mail theft. Basic theft charges in many states do not effectively address the issue. Many states grade theft offenses by the value of the property, but mail containing the sender or recipient's personally identifiable information, or a check made out for a bill payment, is typically valueless for charging purposes.

Additionally, there is no juvenile justice system federally. In instances in which a juvenile is apprehended in possession of stolen mail or a stolen postal key, federal prosecutors must decide whether to charge the juvenile as an adult in the federal system or let the perpetrator walk. We have observed juvenile actors being used at various levels of criminal organizations, often due to the very fact that there will be few consequences if they are caught.

As discussed above, lone actors and informal criminal groups have largely been supplanted by sophisticated organized criminal elements. While federal charges may be appropriate for some members of the groups, state charges may be most appropriate for others. Law enforcement and prosecutors need the flexibility of state charges in many instances to seek justice, deterrence, and rehabilitation. Further, as is the case with drug trafficking organizations, charging one member of the organization is often a way to build a case against a group's leadership. The ability for federal law enforcement and prosecutors to work together with state law enforcement and prosecutors to investigate, disrupt, and dismantle entire criminal organizations through a collaborative effort at the state and federal level is critical.

### **Conclusion**

In spite of the challenges, the Postal Inspection Service is committed to protecting all postal employees, securing the mail, and defending the Postal Service's infrastructure from criminal attack. We have answered the call for 250 years and will continue our proud tradition of service. We are committed to our mission and continually making significant investments of time, capital, personnel, and resources to protect all postal employees and the mail. We will continue to make these crucial investments into the future, working with all of our partners to ensure that the public's trust in the mail endures and that postal employees are able to safely perform their essential service to the American public.

Thank you, Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Mfume, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

# CHECK WASHING & CHECK THEFT SCAMS ⚠️



The United States Postal Inspection Service recovers more than **\$1 BILLION** in fraudulent checks & money orders each year. If you mailed a check that was paid, but the recipient never received it, criminals may have stolen it.



Fraudsters are targeting paper checks sent through the mail. Once they have a check that you mailed, they use chemicals to “wash” the check allowing them to change the amount or make themselves the payee. Then, they deposit or cash your check and steal your money.



Postal Inspectors across the country work hard to protect your mail. Help Postal Inspectors keep the mail safe by following these tips.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOUR MAIL



Get your mail promptly after delivery. Don't leave it in your mailbox overnight.



If you're heading out of town, ask the post office to hold your mail until you return.



Sign up for informed delivery at USPS.com. It sends you daily email notifications of incoming mail and packages.



Contact the sender if you don't receive mail that you're expecting.



Consider buying security envelopes to conceal the contents of your mail.



Use the letter slots inside your Post Office to send mail.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHECKS



Use pens with indelible black ink so it is more difficult for a criminal to wash your checks.



Don't leave blank spaces in the payee or amount lines.



Don't write personal details, such as your Social Security number, credit card information, driver's license number or phone number on checks.



Use mobile or online banking to access copies of your checks and ensure they are not altered. While logged in, review your bank activity and statements for errors.



If your bank provides an image of a paid check, review the back of the check to ensure the indorsement information is correct and matches the intended payee, since criminals will sometimes deposit your check unaltered.



Consider using e-check, ACH automatic payments and other electronic and/or mobile payments.



Follow up with payees to make sure that they received your check.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE A VICTIM?

File a report immediately with:



**Your bank** and request copies of all fraudulent checks



**Your local police department**



**The United States Postal Inspection Service**  
at [uspis.gov/report](https://uspis.gov/report) or call 1-877-876-2455







# PROJECT SAFE DELIVERY

**COMBATING MAIL THEFT  
AND LETTER CARRIER  
ROBBERIES STRATEGY**

MARCH 2024





UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

### > A MESSAGE FROM THE POSTMASTER GENERAL

#### **The mission of the United States**

**Postal Service** ("Postal Service") is to bind all Americans across our nation through trusted, safe, and secure communications and services. A critical part of that mission includes protecting our customers, employees, and infrastructure

from criminal activity and securing the mail from criminal misuse and attack.



*Louis DeJoy,  
Postmaster General*

The Postal Service has recently experienced a significant increase in mail theft and associated violent crimes directed at letter carriers. The

Postal Service shares the concerns of its customers and employees, Congress, and the American public about this increased criminal activity.

All Postal Service employees are entitled to a safe workplace, and all Postal Service customers deserve the secure delivery of their mail. At every level of this agency, we are committed to ensuring the safety of our employees, as well as ensuring safe and secure mail delivery. Our law enforcement and security arm, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service ("Postal Inspection Service"), leads our efforts in this mission by investigating and arresting criminals who commit mail theft and attack our employees. The Postal Inspection Service also collaborates with the Postal Service to implement enhanced security measures to prevent these crimes from occurring.

The Postal Service and the Postal Inspection Service are fully committed to the strategy articulated in this document. As it has done throughout its history, the Postal Service is taking all practicable measures to ensure the safety of Postal Service employees, to safeguard the nation's mail, and to provide the best, most efficient service possible to the American public.



## INTRODUCTION

### > A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF POSTAL INSPECTOR

**The Postal Inspection Service's highest priority** is and has always been the protection of Postal Service employees. Recently, Postal Service employees have come under



Gary Barksdale,  
Chief Postal Inspector

increased attack by criminals seeking to perpetrate financial crimes utilizing stolen mail. In response, the Postal Inspection Service has significantly increased our efforts to protect both Postal Service employees and the mail they carry. The Postal Inspection Service takes a holistic approach to this, collaborating with the Postal Service to enhance the physical security of mail receptacles, increase awareness among Postal Service

employees on how to remain safe while at work, increase awareness among the public of strategies to protect their mail, and focus on high-impact investigations into attacks on Postal Service employees and associated mail theft. This approach relies on close cooperation across the Postal Service, as well as with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, including the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General. It also relies upon important public-private partnerships, such as with the financial industry.

We have already made significant progress in implementing the strategy outlined in this document, and we will continue to follow the blueprint laid out in these pages to ensure a successful, enterprise-wide approach to protect Postal Service employees and secure the mail. As we face this current challenge and challenges to come, the Postal Inspection Service is focused on and committed to preserving and protecting the integrity of the U.S. Mail.

## INTRODUCTION

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### > EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Combating mail theft and violent crimes targeting postal employees** is of the highest priority for the Postal Service and the Postal Inspection Service. As the law enforcement arm of the Postal Service, the Postal Inspection Service leads the Postal Service's efforts to protect all postal employees, including letter carriers, and ensure the secure delivery of mail to the American public.

This *Combating Mail Theft and Letter Carrier Robberies Strategy* (hereinafter the "Strategy") is designed to guide decision making, coordination, and resource allocation throughout the Postal Inspection Service and the Postal Service. This Strategy aims to protect postal employees and the American public by securing the Postal Service delivery network from criminal attack, disrupting mail theft and violent crimes against postal employees, and implementing prevention strategies that empower postal employees and the American public.

The Postal Inspection Service employs a whole-of-government approach that relies heavily on

interagency cooperation—specifically with our partners in the Department of Justice, the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement partners. Working with these partners and with all of the Postal Service, the Postal Inspection Service will achieve the following goals:

1. Enhance Delivery Security
2. Advance Intelligence-Led Investigations
3. Deploy Communications and Increase Prevention Awareness
4. Invest in Tools, Technology, and Data Analytics
5. Deploy Advanced Training

The Postal Service is always working to earn the trust of the American public. The Postal Inspection Service plays a key role in maintaining that trust by protecting Postal Service employees, the American people, and the sanctity of the U.S. Mail.

This Strategy is a living document that will evolve in response to the changing nature of mail theft and violent crime targeting postal workers.





UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

# BACKGROUND

## BACKGROUND

**Beginning around 2020, and continuing to present date,** the Postal Service has experienced a significant increase in mail theft from mail receptacles, primarily due to financially motivated crimes like check fraud. This is evidenced by a 139% increase in reports of high-volume mail theft from mail receptacles between Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 and FY 2023, with 20,574 reports in FY 2019 and 49,146 reports in FY 2023. The significant rise in mail theft and associated financial crimes appears to be driven by organized criminal groups who have shifted their focus towards the perpetration of low-risk, high-reward financial crimes. This is evidenced by Postal Inspection Service investigations, Department of Treasury data, and data from financial industry sources. Although there is no single cause for this shift, it likely is due in part to mass pandemic relief fraud perpetrated during the Covid-19 pandemic, cyber-enabled techniques that facilitate the perpetration of financial crime, and a lax prosecutorial climate for property and financial crimes in some U.S. jurisdictions.

Prior to 2020, mail theft from mail receptacles was primarily perpetrated through forced entry or using fishing devices. However, that shifted as the Postal Service and the Postal Inspection Service strengthened the physical security of blue collection boxes. These efforts included employing anti-fishing devices, high-security collection boxes (HSCBs), and modified arrow locks (MALs). Despite physical security enhancements, blue collection boxes and other mail receptacles remain an attractive target for criminals who have sought to exploit design vulnerabilities.

During the same period these physical security enhancements were implemented, the Postal Service began to experience a marked increase in letter carrier robberies. The rise in letter carrier robberies is evidenced by an 845% increase between FY 2019 and FY 2023, with 64 letter carrier robberies in FY 2019 and 605 letter carrier robberies in FY 2023.







BACKGROUND

# STRATEGIC GOALS



UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

1.0

## ENHANCE DELIVERY SECURITY

**THE POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE HAS DEVELOPED FIVE (5) STRATEGIC GOALS THAT FORM THE STRATEGY. THESE GOALS FOCUS OUR EFFORTS IN A MANNER THAT WILL ENSURE SUCCESS NOW AND IN THE FUTURE:**



**1. ENHANCE DELIVERY SECURITY**



**2. ADVANCE INTELLIGENCE-LED INVESTIGATIONS**



**3. DEPLOY COMMUNICATIONS AND INCREASE PREVENTION AWARENESS**



**4. INVEST IN TOOLS, TECHNOLOGY, AND DATA ANALYTICS**



**5. DEPLOY ADVANCED TRAINING**

This Strategy provides a broad outline of our priorities to set the direction and approach for our future. It does not attempt to detail every activity

or initiative the Postal Inspection Service will pursue to achieve our strategic goals.

Enhancing delivery security is crucial to stopping mail thieves and preventing associated postal crimes, such as robberies of letter carriers. Three key components of this effort are deploying more secure mail receptacles, installing better locking mechanisms, and implementing increased security and accountability for arrow keys.

The Postal Inspection Service will work with the Postal Service to develop and deploy advanced technologies to secure and protect the Postal Service network and its employees. The Postal Inspection Service will also work with the Postal Service to identify and implement other security enhancements, including process improvements and collection box placement modifications.

### 1.1 INCREASE THE SECURITY OF POSTAL SERVICE MAIL RECEPTACLES

As the starting and ending point for most mail that passes through the mailstream, mail receptacles are at the core of the Postal Service delivery network. Due to the location and vulnerabilities of some mail receptacles, such as Postal Service blue boxes, they may be susceptible to attack. To deter ever-evolving criminals, the Postal Service, in coordination with the Postal Inspection Service, will increase security measures for Postal Service mail receptacles. This will include designing, purchasing, and deploying new lock technologies, strengthening mail collection boxes by installing anti-fishing measures, and purchasing and deploying additional high-security collection boxes.





## ENHANCE DELIVERY SECURITY



### 1.2 **ENHANCE THE SECURITY OF POSTAL SERVICE DELIVERY VEHICLES**

The Postal Inspection Service collaborated with the Postal Service on the design of a new delivery vehicle that integrates enhanced security components, providing increased protection for letter carriers and preventing vehicle break-ins and mail theft. Until these new vehicles are built and fully deployed, the Postal Inspection Service will continue to collaborate with the Postal Service to enhance security for existing delivery vehicles, especially in high postal crime areas where delivery vehicles are frequently targeted for mail theft. Enhanced security for these delivery vehicles will harden the target to mitigate mail theft until the deployment of new delivery vehicles.

### 1.3 **COORDINATE WITH THE POSTAL SERVICE ON ARROW KEY ACCOUNTABILITY**

As a critical access control component for the Postal Service's delivery network, the arrow key requires a high level of accountability among the postal employees who have access to and handle them. The Postal Inspection Service will work with the Postal Service on process improvements and technological solutions to improve arrow key accountability among postal employees. The Postal Inspection Service will also share lost or stolen arrow key data with the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General. The Postal Inspection Service will refer employees who fail to maintain accountability for arrow keys to the U.S. Postal Service Office of the Inspector General for investigation, as well to Postal Service management for corrective action. Finally, the Postal Inspection Service will work with the Postal Service to implement electronic key accountability systems to secure arrow keys and increase Postal Service employee accountability for arrow keys.



## UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

### 2.0

# ADVANCE INTELLIGENCE-LED INVESTIGATIONS

Intelligence is an indispensable tool for addressing mail theft and associated financial and violent crimes. The Postal Inspection Service will leverage internal and external data sources and the latest technologies to strategically focus investigations, gain investigative insights, and ultimately bring perpetrators of these crimes to justice. The Postal Inspection Service will accomplish this in collaboration with the Postal Service and external partners, including but not limited to local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, as well as private-sector partners.

### 2.1 **LEVERAGE INTELLIGENCE TO GUIDE INVESTIGATIONS**

The Postal Inspection Service will expand its use of criminal intelligence from a variety of sources and expand partnerships to maximize the impact of its investigations. The Postal Inspection Service will further develop our connections within the financial industry to identify new trends, inform investigative techniques and data needs, develop criminal intelligence, and disrupt illicit money movement, including money mule activity.

To accomplish this, the Postal Inspection Service will build upon its long-running relationships with its financial industry partners, such as the National Cyber Forensic Training Alliance, as well as its own Financial Industry Mail Security Initiative, where the Postal Inspection Service, law enforcement partners, and the financial industry come together to share the latest financial crime trends, criminal intelligence, and mitigation strategies.

The Postal Inspection Service will similarly collaborate with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners, including the Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Secret Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, among others, to identify new and emerging trends, share criminal intelligence, develop investigations, and identify collusive postal employees. These partnerships will act as a force multiplier in tackling mail theft and disrupting associated criminal activity.





## ADVANCE INTELLIGENCE-LED INVESTIGATIONS

The Postal Inspection Service will also expand its partnerships to the technology sector and seek to increase the sharing of criminal intelligence and emerging trends with technology companies. These proposed partnerships would include collaboration with social media companies, online marketplaces and fintech companies, among others, to notify those technology companies on the misuse of their platforms, to inform business decisions made by those technology companies involving the disruption of illegal conduct on their platforms, and to reduce overall mail theft-related criminal activity.

### 2.2 COORDINATE WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE ON THE PROSECUTION OF CRIMINAL ENTERPRISES

The Department of Justice (DOJ), as the federal prosecutor, is an essential partner in the Postal Inspection Service's enforcement of federal law,



including federal statutes pertinent to mail theft and associated financial and violent crimes. The Postal Inspection Service will engage with DOJ at all levels and share emerging trends on criminal enterprises, criminal intelligence, and knowledge through training of DOJ personnel. The Postal Inspection Service will collaborate with DOJ to target and prioritize investigations of criminal organizations, especially those that commit gun violence and other violent acts against letter carriers, in alignment with DOJ's FY 2022-FY 2026 Strategic Plan. The Postal Inspection Service will also employ special assistant United States attorneys in a strategic manner to complement DOJ's prosecutorial resources, ensuring dedicated attention to postal crimes, including mail theft and violent crimes perpetrated against Postal Service employees.

### 2.3 DEPLOY AND UTILIZE PERSONNEL STRATEGICALLY TO ADVANCE AND SUPPORT INTELLIGENCE-LED INVESTIGATIONS

To meet the demands caused by the rise in mail theft and violent crime against Postal Service employees, the Postal Inspection Service will reorient the way it approaches both problems with our personnel resources. We will ensure resources are strategically assigned, including temporarily surging personnel to high postal crime areas, deploying specially trained violent crime specialists to critical incidents, employing financial crime task force officers, and placing personnel on task forces, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Violent Crimes Task Forces. These personnel allocations will expedite intelligence sharing, advance investigations, and leverage partnerships to bring additional resources to bear on these issues.



## UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

### 3.0

# DEPLOY COMMUNICATIONS AND INCREASE PREVENTION AWARENESS

Communicating internally with postal employees and externally with the American public is essential to empowering postal employees to protect themselves and the American public to protect their mail and financial security.

Communicating internally with postal employees and externally with the American public about mail theft, and associated financial and violent crimes, is key to raising awareness about these issues and awareness about steps that both postal employees and the public can take to protect themselves. This also brings transparency to the actions that the Postal Inspection Service and Postal Service are taking in response to these issues, including security enhancements and investigative successes.

### 3.1 ENGAGE IN PREVENTION AWARENESS MESSAGING ON MAIL THEFT AND EMPLOYEE SAFETY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERS

#### 3.1.1 Increase Employee Safety and Mail Theft Prevention Awareness Among Postal Service Employees

The Postal Inspection Service will continue to leverage key relationships with the Postal Service to develop and distribute employee safety and mail theft prevention awareness material through Postal Service channels to Postal Service employees. The Postal Inspection Service will also collaborate with the Postal Service on partnerships with the Postal Service's unions, such as



## DEPLOY COMMUNICATIONS AND INCREASE PREVENTION AWARENESS

the National Association of Letter Carriers, to garner support for prevention efforts that protect Postal Service employees from violent crimes.

### 3.1.2 Increase mail theft prevention and financial crime prevention awareness among Postal Service customers

The Postal Inspection Service will continue to develop and utilize all of its communication channels to distribute mail theft prevention and financial crime prevention awareness materials to Postal Service customers. The Postal Inspection Service will also leverage key relationships with the Postal Service to distribute mail theft and financial crime prevention material through Postal Service channels. The Postal Inspection Service will continue to foster external partnerships, such as with the American Bankers Association, the International Association of Financial Crimes Investigators, and the National Cyber Forensics Training Alliance, and develop new external partnerships to share mail theft and financial crime prevention material with the public.

### 3.2 ENGAGE IN REGULAR COMMUNICATION WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO RAISE AWARENESS OF POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE AND POSTAL SERVICE EFFORTS TO PROTECT EMPLOYEES AND THE MAIL

Awareness of key stakeholders on actions the Postal Inspection Service and Postal Service have taken and are taking to address mail theft and associated violent and financial crimes is vital to ensuring public trust and public confidence in both the Postal Service and Postal Inspection Service. It is also vital to securing the confidence of all Postal Service employees. The Postal Inspection Service will regularly engage in a transparent manner with key internal and external stakeholders,

such as Congress, the American Bankers Association, the Independent Community Bankers of America, the Bank Policy Institute, and the Financial Services Sector Coordinating Council, among others, to update them and their constituents on actions that are being undertaken to secure the Postal Service's delivery network, investigative successes, and prevention strategies. When appropriate, the Postal Inspection Service will also seek input from key stakeholders so that constructive feedback may inform our efforts.

### 3.3 IMPROVE VICTIM NOTIFICATION AND SUPPORT

Violent crimes against Postal Service employees, including letter carrier robberies and mail theft, have a significant impact on victims, albeit often in different ways. The Postal Inspection Service, as part of its investigative mission, provides notification and support to victims as required by statute and regulation. The Postal Inspection Service will identify ways it can improve its support to victims, especially Postal Service employees who are victims of letter carrier robberies. The Postal Inspection Service will also seek to improve notification and messaging to both known and potential victims of mail theft and related financial crimes.



## UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

4.0

# INVEST IN TOOLS, TECHNOLOGY AND DATA ANALYTICS

The continuous development and application of data analytics to mail theft, and associated financial and violent crimes against Postal Service employees, is critical to identifying real-time emerging trends associated with these crimes, gathering investigative intelligence, and allocating and deploying investigative resources. To accomplish this, the Postal Inspection Service will identify relevant mail theft-related data sources, organize the data into an efficient environment where applied analytics may be performed, and leverage analytics personnel to apply data analytics techniques and perform continuous data analysis.

### 4.1 ENHANCE POSTAL SERVICE AND POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE DATA COLLECTION

The Postal Inspection Service will work with the Postal Service to improve the collection of mail theft-related data, such as that associated with high-volume mail

theft complaints and customer mail theft complaints. Though the Postal Service and the Postal Inspection Service both currently collect useful mail theft-related data, we will enhance our data-collection processes while also facilitating easier reporting for the public.

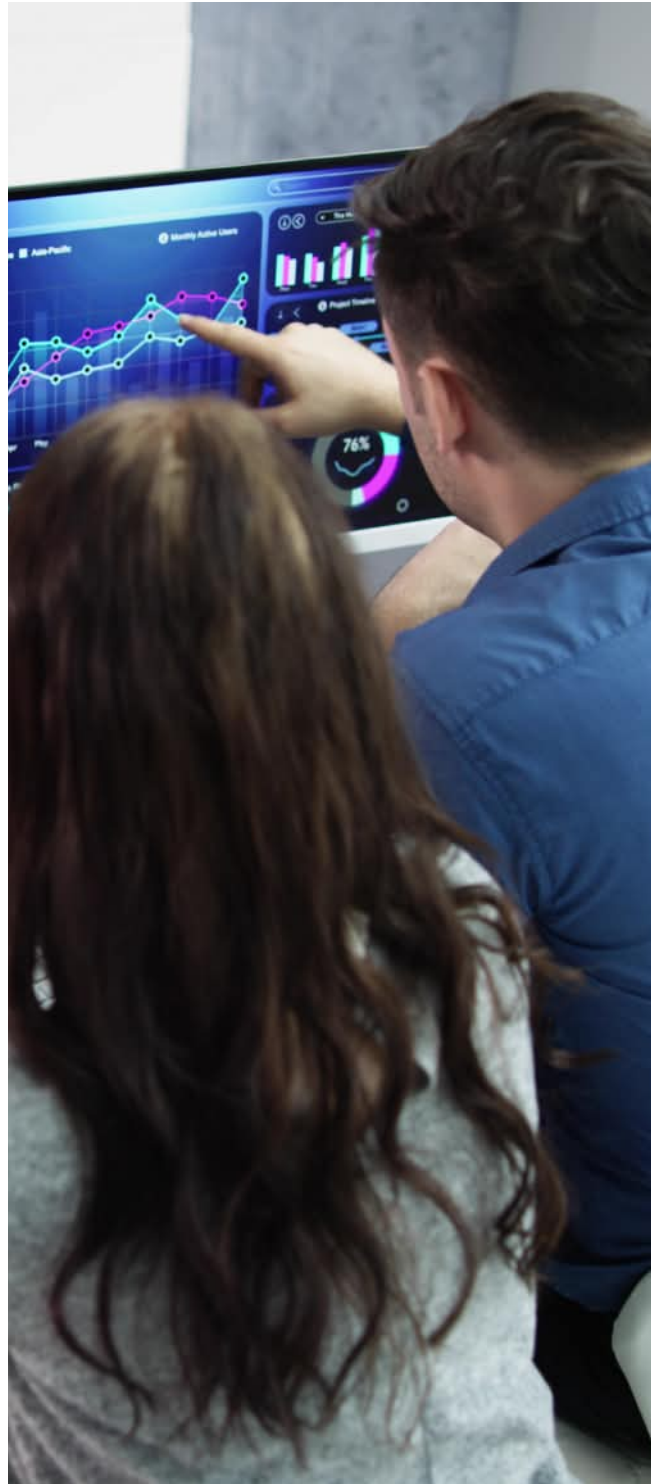
### 4.2 LEVERAGE POSTAL SERVICE DATA AND EXTERNAL DATA SOURCES

The Postal Inspection Service will leverage Postal Service data, Postal Inspection Service data, and external data sources, such as from financial industry partners. This will allow the Postal Inspection Service to quickly identify emerging trends, develop investigative intelligence, monitor the success of security enhancements, and allocate resources.





## INVEST IN TOOLS, TECHNOLOGY, AND DATA ANALYTICS



### 4.3 EXPAND DATA ANALYTICS CAPABILITIES

The Postal Inspection Service will take a range of measures to expand its analytics capabilities, including but not limited to identifying and procuring new or additional existing analytics tools and assigning specialized personnel to support analytics functions and continue to identify the needs of the Postal Inspection Service. Expanded data analytics capabilities are required to take full advantage of internal and external data, as well as to realize its full potential in aiding investigations and prevention efforts. Expanded data analytics capabilities will result in an increased capacity to perform trend analysis associated with mail theft and associated financial and violent crimes, increased investigative intelligence, increased investigative support, and greater insights.

### 4.4 INVEST IN TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

The rise in mail theft and violence against postal workers is exacerbated by trends in technology. Many recent technological advances make it easier for bad actors to share criminal tactics and strategies, sell stolen financial instruments, encrypt communications, transfer illicit funds, and evade or defeat security measures. This is evidenced by the proliferation of the stolen financial instruments and arrow keys available for sale on online market places, messaging platforms like Telegram, the use of peer-to-peer payment services, and crypto currencies to transfer fraudulently obtained funds. The Postal Inspection Service will procure and introduce new tools and technologies, including software, hardware, and services, which will enhance capabilities to confront these evolving challenges.



## UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

5.0

# DEPLOY ADVANCED TRAINING

As technology, criminal techniques, and criminals themselves rapidly evolve, so must our training to ensure that personnel are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully investigate mail theft and associated financial and violent crimes. Deploying advanced training for postal inspectors and other personnel is critical to ensure that the Postal Inspection Service can meet this challenge head-on.

Expanding the cadre of Postal Inspection Service personnel who have advanced training in mail theft investigations, financial crimes investigations, cyber investigations, and violent crimes investigations is critical to ensuring Postal Inspection Service personnel are highly trained and competent to investigate, prevent, and otherwise address the challenges posed by mail theft and associated financial and violent crimes.

### 5.1 SPECIALIZED CYBER TRAINING FOR POSTAL INSPECTORS AND OTHER PERSONNEL INVESTIGATING MAIL THEFT RELATED TO SOCIAL MEDIA/INTERNET

Criminals operate on both Clearnet (publicly accessible networks/internet, including messaging platforms) and Darknet networks (anonymous networks, including peer-to-peer connections or through proxy networks). Increased training of Postal Inspection Service personnel on such cyber-based networks is critical to our ability to conduct investigations of cyber-enabled activity associated with mail theft and related financial and violent crimes. The Postal Inspection Service will develop and present specialized training, including online undercover training, to its personnel so that they can successfully conduct cyber-based investigations involving mail theft and associated crimes. This will also build a foundation to combat future crime trends.





## DEPLOY ADVANCED TRAINING

### 5.2 ADVANCED TRAINING FOR POSTAL INSPECTORS AND OTHER PERSONNEL INVESTIGATING LETTER CARRIER ROBBERIES AND VIOLENT ATTACKS ON POSTAL EMPLOYEES

Robberies of letter carriers and violent attacks on postal employees are often quick and sometimes without any apparent evidence which would lead to the identification and prosecution of the perpetrator. However, there are advanced investigative techniques specific to robbery investigations which increase the chances of a successful case resolution. The Postal Inspection Service currently delivers and will continue to deliver training on advanced robbery investigation techniques to its personnel. This training enables inspectors and analysts to employ these higher-level investigative

techniques to the most complex robbery cases, resulting in the likelihood of better investigative outcomes.

### 5.3 ADVANCED FINANCIAL CRIMES TRAINING

Mail theft and associated financial and violent crimes have been driven primarily by criminals with a financial motive. These criminals engage in complex schemes to facilitate the theft and laundering of victim funds, requiring Postal Inspection Service personnel to understand the many intricate aspects of financial crimes and corresponding investigative techniques. The Postal Inspection Service will deliver advanced financial crimes training to its postal inspectors and other personnel, which will empower them to develop evidence that will result in successful prosecution.

## EMPLOYEE SAFETY IS VITAL

**The safety and security of our employees, facilities, vehicles, and the U.S. Mail® is of the utmost importance to the Postal Service™ and the Postal Inspection Service™.**

**Here are some tips to help all employees stay safe:**



- 1 Be aware of your surroundings. Looking alert can deter an attacker.



- 4 Report incidents of individuals with undue curiosity in Postal Service operations or assets to your supervisor. Note any details about the person and their vehicle.



- 2 Maintain physical security. Ensure that doors to facilities and vehicles are always locked.



- 5 Leave the area if you see suspicious activity and call 9-1-1 when it's safe. Then, call your supervisor, who will call postal inspectors.



- 3 Keep all postal keys and arrow keys chained to your person and out of sight. Don't flaunt valuables.



- 6 If you are robbed or attacked on your route, comply with the assailant's demands. Nothing is more valuable than your life. When it is safe to do so, write down any details you can remember and provide them to your supervisor and postal inspectors.

**Remember: You are our most important delivery!**



UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

# CONCLUSION

**The Postal Inspection Service is committed to protecting all postal employees, securing the mail, and defending the Postal Service's infrastructure from criminal attack. These duties are central to the Postal Inspection Service's mission, and we are firmly resolved to meeting this responsibility. As the Postal Service, its employees, and its infrastructure face increased criminal attack, the Postal Inspection Service reaffirms its commitment to its mission. The Postal Inspection Service and the Postal Service are making significant investments of time, capital, personnel, and resources to protect all postal employees and the mail. We will continue to make these crucial investments into the future, working with all of our partners to ensure that the public's trust in the mail endures and that postal employees are able to safely perform their essential service to the American public.**



UNITED STATES  
POSTAL SERVICE

HEADQUARTERS

