

Testimony of
Brian L. Renfroe
President, National Association of Letter Carriers
Hearing on “An Update on Mail Theft and Crime” by the House Subcommittee on
Government Operations
July 23, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Sessions and Ranking Member Mfume, for this invitation to testify on mail theft and the horrific, violent assaults that have victimized thousands of letter carriers and other postal employees. Thank you also to the members of this subcommittee for the chance to bring the voice of America’s 295,000 active and retired letter carriers to today’s hearing.

This week, America’s Post Office celebrates its 250th anniversary. Our postal system is older than our country, enshrined in the Constitution, and has been a lifeline connecting communities since its founding. Throughout our country’s history, whether in the face of wartime, national strife, natural disasters, extreme temperatures or global pandemics, letter carriers have consistently upheld the agency’s universal service obligation, all without being targets of violence. Unfortunately, in recent years, this has changed.

According to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), between 2019 and 2023 (the most recent available data), the number of serious crimes committed against postal employees nearly doubled, driven primarily by a rise in robberies targeting city letter carriers. Over that same period, the number of robbery cases opened by postal inspectors increased nearly sevenfold. In 2023, postal inspectors opened 1,367 cases—628

robberies, 542 assaults and 197 burglaries—for crimes committed against postal employees in almost 500 metropolitan areas.

Due to the solitary nature of our work and the sensitive and valuable equipment we carry, city letter carriers are disproportionately targeted. City letter carriers were the victims of 90 percent of these robberies in 2023.

More specifically, according to a May 2024 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, about 51 percent of USPS investigations in 2023 involved theft or attempted theft of an arrow key, an increase from only 10 percent in 2017. An arrow key is a universal key that letter carriers carry, unlocking collection boxes, apartment panels, parcel lockers and other types of mailboxes, sometimes for an entire ZIP Code. These keys allow access to a variety of valuable mail. In many incidents, criminals are after these keys, which can sell for thousands of dollars on the black market.

In April 2022, a letter carrier was delivering at an apartment complex in Oklahoma City when an assailant approached him from behind, held him at gunpoint, and forced him to give up his arrow key. Fearing for his life, the carrier complied. The assailant then demanded the carrier's cell phone and crushed it on the ground. Fortunately, when the assailant fled, the carrier was able to call 911 from his smart watch. The carrier was traumatized and could not sleep for a month. He never went back to that apartment complex and transferred to a different route.

Three months later, a different carrier was at the same Oklahoma City apartment complex when he was robbed at gunpoint for his arrow key. Less than three months after

that, the same carrier was robbed a second time at gunpoint in the same vicinity. Yet again, the assailant was in pursuit of the arrow key.

The value of these keys and the lack of protections have left letter carriers defenseless and made them sitting targets. Carriers are constantly looking over their shoulders, fearful for their safety, while they continue to show up and dutifully serve their communities. It is not right. It is not fair. And to ensure the safety and security of America's mail, more must be done to support and protect letter carriers.

Every attack, assault and crime against one of our members is heartbreaking. Federal employees in uniform doing their jobs are being physically and mentally harmed. And these are not petty crimes. They are violent federal crimes that deeply affect the victims. As referenced in the stories above, firearms have been increasingly present in robbery cases against postal employees. According to the GAO, in 2022 and 2023, nearly 70 percent of robbery cases involved firearms.

These are not just statistics. Each assault and threat at gunpoint is directed at a person. They are directed at public servants who work hard every day to serve the American people. I would like to share a few examples with you to illustrate what my members have had to bear.

In January 2023, a Pittsburgh letter carrier was delivering mail when a man aggressively confronted the carrier, demanding to know the location of his mail. The carrier did not recognize the man as a customer from his route, so he politely asked for the man's address and said he would assist him as soon as he finished at his current delivery point.

As the carrier headed to his next customer's porch, the man opened fire at him, shooting three rounds. Fortunately, the carrier was not physically injured and was able to use nearby vehicles as shields but undoubtedly suffered the anguish of experiencing such an attack.

Later that year, in August, an Orlando, Florida, letter carrier was delivering from her postal vehicle in a cul-de-sac when a car pulled up behind her. Three assailants exited the car and surrounded the delivery truck. One stood at the passenger side with an assault rifle, while another appeared at the driver's side with two handguns, and the third stood guard. Three guns were pointed at a letter carrier in broad daylight while the perpetrators demanded her arrow key. The carrier spent the next several days at home, away from work, attempting to recover from the unimaginable attack.

Another grievous attack occurred in November 2024, when a letter carrier in Muskegon, Michigan, was delivering on her route and a hooded assailant approached her at gunpoint and attempted to sexually assault her in her postal vehicle. She was able to persuade the assailant to let her go and fled to safety in a customer's home, where she called 911. The carrier took a couple of weeks off work to recover before feeling comfortable enough to return to work.

These stories, and thousands of others like them, are shocking and repugnant. The only small positive in these aforementioned stories is that the letter carriers survived. However, some of these violent crimes have tragically ended in death.

In the last three years, five letter carriers have been murdered on the job. Aundre Cross from Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Jonte Davis from Youngstown, Ohio; Jay Larson from

Rockford, Illinois; Octavia Redmond from Chicago, Illinois; and Ray Hodge from Bronx, New York, lost their lives to senseless acts of violence while on the job.

The most recent murder was only months ago. In January, Ray Hodge was on his lunch break at a deli when another customer stabbed him. He was rushed to the hospital but later died. While he was taking his scheduled break from his everyday duties, his life was stolen from him. Ray had been a letter carrier for seven years. He was a father, son and friend who was beloved by his co-workers and customers.

Protecting America's mail starts with protecting those who deliver it. The Postal Service cannot expect to recruit and retain talented, dedicated letter carriers, when crime, assault, and even murder are becoming part of a respectable, federal service job. The increase in attacks has absolutely had an impact on carriers' decisions to stay at the Postal Service and build a long-term career.

One such example is a letter carrier in Cincinnati, Ohio, who had been delivering for nearly five years before she was the victim of a crime on the job for the first time. She was delivering at an apartment complex when a child ran outside for help. With no one else around willing to help, the carrier followed the child and found a man attacking a woman inside an apartment. While the carrier called 911, the assailant spotted her, grabbed her by the neck, carried her outside, and tossed her into some nearby trash cans. The man started throwing glass at both women until he finally fled. While the carrier had marks on her neck and felt achy for a few days, she fortunately made a full physical recovery. This carrier was proud of herself for heading back to work only a few days later.

However, less than nine months later, the same carrier was on a different route when a young man wearing a ski mask approached her. He demanded she give him her keys or else he would kill her. She complied, and the assailant fled. After this second incident, the carrier missed more than a week of work and later said that she was “terrified in a way that would affect me for months to come.”

She repeatedly called the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and was eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She endured a months-long struggle with anxiety to regain confidence in completing everyday activities. Though the carrier eventually returned to work, she ultimately—and understandably—decided to leave her career as a letter carrier.

While all violent attacks against our members are appalling and illegal, they are made worse by the fact that the perpetrators often act without consequence. Even though the number of assaults and robberies against letter carriers has surged in recent years, the number of arrests and convictions has remained unconscionably low. In Fiscal Year 2023, USPS reported that it responded to 6,729 reports of violent crimes or threats, which resulted in only 289 arrests for assault and 193 arrests for robbery.

Due to workload and differing priorities, these cases often sit untouched on attorneys’ desks. According to the USPS, between 2016 and 2023, only about 40 percent of robbery and assault cases resulted in arrests, and approximately 26 percent led to convictions.

Even with arrest and prosecution rates alarmingly low, when an alleged perpetrator is convicted, the sentence does not always match the severity of the crime. Under current law, the sentencing guidelines for these crimes committed against federal employees in uniform and on the job are overly weak and permissive.

For example, in 2024, a San Francisco defendant was convicted of robbing a letter carrier at gunpoint and sentenced to only 30 days' imprisonment. Meanwhile, the assailant who stabbed Ray Hodge to death in New York earlier this year was convicted and received a 15-year sentence for murdering the 36-year-old father who was on his lunch break.

The Postal Service is aware of the severity of these crimes, and in a May 2023 press release, USPS and the Postal Inspection Service acknowledged that "incidents of letter carrier robberies are on the rise across the nation." The Postal Service has taken steps, as part of its Project Safe Delivery initiative, to devalue the arrow key infrastructure that has made letter carriers vulnerable. But the efforts are moving slowly. In April 2023, the Postal Service announced it had begun deploying 12,000 new high-security collection boxes in high-risk areas, with plans to deploy more than 58,000 in coming years. For context, the Postal Service has 140,000 regular collection boxes. The Postal Service has also stated it has plans to replace more than 9 million electronic modified arrow keys and associated locks.

While these are positive steps, immediate action is necessary to protect letter carriers and ensure the security of America's mail. Without guaranteed funding, the Postal

Service has not been able to provide a timeline for when all collection boxes, arrow keys, and associated locks will be modernized and replaced.

NALC supports the bipartisan Protect Our Letter Carriers Act (H.R. 1065/S. 463), which would provide the necessary funding to modernize all collection boxes and arrow keys and associated locks, direct district attorneys to prioritize cases involving crimes against postal employees, and standardize sentencing guidelines for these crimes. This comprehensive solution will address the core issue, provide necessary modernization of postal infrastructure, and deter these crimes from happening, ultimately keeping letter carriers, and the mail they deliver, safer, too. NALC strongly urges Congress to pass this bill.

When mail theft is discussed, many argue that the problem lies within the organization. However, statistics prove that internal mail theft cases are exceedingly rare.

Between 2020 and 2023, the Postal Service employed upward of 650,000 people. During the same time, as few as 2 percent of postal employees were involved in cases where the OIG found evidence of mail theft. In a massive operation like the Postal Service, unfortunately, some with ill intent might slip through the cracks. Although extremely rare, NALC strongly condemns internal mail theft and is committed to working with the Postal Service, the OIG, Congress and all necessary stakeholders to ensure that fraud and abuse have no place at USPS.

Letter carriers take an oath to uphold their duties. The security and safe delivery of America's mail is a great responsibility that we proudly bear. Under the Postal Service's universal service obligation, every American has the right to secure, timely and affordable

mail services. Maintaining this universal service obligation starts by protecting those who deliver America's 376 million pieces of mail and packages every day. Our country's mail cannot be protected if the people who deliver it are not safe. Guaranteeing letter carrier safety is best for the Postal Service, the customers we serve, and the entire country.