

[Date]

The Honorable David Steiner
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Postmaster General Steiner:

I am concerned about the accuracy of postmark dates on ballots delivered in Washington's Second District. County election officials in my district have raised concern that a United States Postal Service (USPS) initiative may result in election offices' rejecting mail-in ballots for being late, despite voters mailing ballots by election day. To address these concerns, I urge USPS to restore daily evening mail pickups at post offices before the November 3 elections. Reinstating this commonsense policy will ensure ballots are accurately postmarked, delivered and counted in accordance with Washington state law.

Between August and October 2026, I visited local election offices in every county in Washington's Second District. During these visits to Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, Island and San Juan counties, I saw firsthand the important work of local election officials who administer our local, state, and federal elections. Thanks to the dedicated efforts and those of volunteers, local elections offices ensure every eligible ballot is secure and accurately counted.

However, during these visits, local election officials raised concern that changes to USPS policy may delay postmarking for mail-in ballots. Washington state law permits counting ballots received after an election if the ballots are postmarked by election day.¹ The state relies on accurate postmarking to implement its election laws and ensure all legally cast ballots are counted. Delays in postmarking can cause mail-in ballots to be wrongly rejected for being late, even if the ballots were mailed on election day. To ensure that Washington's elections are secure and fair, USPS must reliably postmark ballots delivered to state election offices.

In April 2025, USPS established a Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO) initiative that eliminated afternoon or evening collections at certain post offices more than 50 miles from a regional processing center.² For these applicable locations, mail deposited later in the day is not collected until the next business day for transportation to a processing facility, potentially

¹ <https://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/federal-impacts-washington-state-elections>

² <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/FR-2025-02-28/2025-03168>

delaying postmarking and delivery. An audit from the Postal Service Inspector General indicated RTO can result in mail getting postmarked on different days than their actual date of mailing.³

Following the August 2026 primary elections in Washington state, Senator Maria Cantwell and Washington Secretary of State Steve Hobbs issued alarming findings about ballot rejection rates during that election period.⁴ According to the report, the statewide rate of ballots rejected for late postmarks increased by 32 percent in August 2026 when compared to those in the 2024 primary.⁵

An analysis from Brookings raises further concern that RTO is contributing to the rise of late ballot rejections, showing that RTO exposure nearly doubled the rate ballots are rejected for arriving late.⁶ In Washington state, locations covered by RTO saw rates increase by 142 percent, the largest of the three states in Brookings' analysis.⁷ Voters who submit their ballots on time should not lose the opportunity to have their votes counted because of preventable postal delays.

Postal workers provide an invaluable service to people across the United States, helping individuals receive their medications, ballots, paychecks, bills and other necessities. They often work long hours and manage operations with limited staff and resources, especially during peak season and during elections.

To ensure ballots are accurately postmarked for the November 3 election, I request answers to the following questions in writing no later than October 30, 2026:

1. Will USPS restore twice-daily collections and provide postal workers with the resources they need to effectively implement this change?
2. How is USPS working with states like Washington to ensure ballots are postmarked to accurately reflect the date they were mailed?
3. What steps is USPS taking to inform people in locations covered by RTO that postmarking may be delayed and that individuals should submit their ballots early to avoid rejection?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent request and for the work postal employees do every day to serve Northwest Washington.

Sincerely,

³ <https://www.uspsaig.gov/reports/audit-reports/processing-election-and-political-mail-2026-primary-elections>

⁴ <https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/news/press-releases/cast-but-never-counted-cantwell-and-secretary-of-state-hobbs-say-trumps-usps-suppressing-wa-mail-in-voting-by-postmarking-or-delivering-ballots-after-election-day>

⁵ https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/snapshot_report_-_increases_in_late_postmarking_disenfranchised_wa_voters.pdf

⁶ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/postal-network-redesign-and-mail-ballot-rejections-in-the-2026-primaries/>

⁷ Ibid

Rick Larsen
U.S. Representative
Washington State, Second District