

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

July 7, 2023

The Honorable Louis DeJoy
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza S.W., Room 10300
Washington, D.C. 20260-1000

Dear Postmaster General DeJoy:

We write to express our deep concerns over the working conditions and labor policies of the U.S. Postal Service, specifically with respect to letters carriers. On Tuesday, June 20, 2023, Eugene Gates Jr., a letter carrier in Texas, died while delivering mail during an extreme heat wave.¹ Mr. Gates had worked for the Postal Service for almost 40 years. His unnecessary and untimely death was likely preventable and a stark reminder of the costs of the global climate emergency and the effect of more frequent and damaging extreme weather events.²

Unfortunately, this is not the first time such a tragic, yet preventable, death has occurred.³ For example, in 2012, John Watzlawick, a postal veteran of 28 years, died after delivering mail in a heat wave in Missouri.⁴ He was forced to continue working in excessive heat despite notifying management that he felt ill from the heat. The medical examiner confirmed that his death was due to heat-related illness.⁵ In 2019, Peggy Frank, a mail carrier from California, was found dead “in her non-air-conditioned mail truck” at a time when temperatures reached 115

¹ *Texas Mailman Dies on Job After Collapsing in 115 Heat Index*, Houston Chronical (June 23, 2023) (online at www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/texas-mailman-dies-heat-wave-18165965.php); *Triple-digit Heat Across Texas is Forecast to Break Energy Records*, CNN (June 16, 2023) (online at www.cnn.com/2023/06/15/weather/texas-heat-setting-energy-usage-records/index.html).

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Aug. 6, 2021) (online at www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Full_Report.pdf).

³ See, e.g., U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, *Press Release: U.S. Postal Service Cited by U.S. Labor Department's OSHA After Heat-Related Death of Medford, Mass., Mail Carrier in July Heat Wave* (Dec. 16, 2013) (online at www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/region1/12162013-0).

⁴ *USPS Found to be at Fault in Metro Mailman's Heat Death from 2012*, Fox 4 (Sept. 18, 2014) (online at www.fox4kc.com/news/usps-found-to-be-at-fault-in-metro-mailmans-heat-death-from-2012/).

⁵ *Postal Service Cited in Carrier's Heat-Related Death*, Kansas Star (May 4, 2023) (online at www.kansascity.com/news/local/article312289/Postal-Service-cited-in-carrier%E2%80%99s-heat-related-death.html).

degrees.⁶ The Los Angeles County Coroner's office listed Ms. Frank's cause of death as being due to an abnormally high body temperature resulting from exposure to extreme heat.⁷ Following Ms. Frank's death, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cited the Postal Service for failing to provide and maintain a work environment free from recognizable hazards, such as extreme heat, that are likely to cause death or serious harm.⁸

According to a recent local news report, in one area of Central Texas, roughly 80 delivery fleet vehicles do not have working air conditioners.⁹ This is on top of recent reports that despite the Postal Service's investment of roughly \$9.6 billion in new fleet vehicles, it appears that deployment of the next generation delivery vehicles will only begin starting mid-2024.¹⁰ However, this is an issue that demands immediate attention. With the increase in extreme heat indexes across the country, we have serious concerns that the Postal Service's failure to invest in and fix existing vehicle air-conditioning units and failure to effectively implement policies to reduce employee exposure to extreme conditions place our letter carriers at risk, especially in the coming months.

We understand that employee unions attempted to mitigate the risks to letter carriers by requesting commonsense solutions. For instance, we understand that some local unions requested the opportunity to begin mail delivery earlier in the day to avoid being on their routes when temperatures hit their peak.¹¹ A 2020 analysis of OSHA records showed that OSHA issued more than \$1.3 million in initial fines against the Postal Service for heat hazards in eight years.¹² Despite these numerous and continued violations, it appears the Postal Service has yet to comprehensively address this issue and adopt nationwide work conditions policies that prevent these avoidable, tragic deaths.¹³

⁶ *U.S. Postal Service Fined \$150,000 After Heat-Related Death of Woodland Hills Mail Carrier*, L.A. Times (Jan. 10, 2019) (online at www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-postal-service-fined-death-20190110-story.html).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *"We're Trapped in These Trucks All Day": U.S. Postal Service Carrier*, KXXV (June 23, 2023) (online at www.kxxv.com/were-trapped-in-these-trucks-all-day-us-postal-service-carrier).

¹⁰ *U.S. Postal Service Next-Generation Delivery Vehicles Delayed to Mid-2024*, Reuters (May, 2, 2023) (online at www.reuters.com/world/us/us-postal-service-next-generation-delivery-vehicles-delayed-mid-2024-2023-05-02/).

¹¹ *"The Mail Will Still be There, My Husband Won't" | Widow of USPS letter Carrier Who Died During Route Pushing for Answers and Change*, WFAA (June 22, 2023) (online at www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/widow-usps-letter-carrier-died-during-route-pushing-for-answers-change/287-fd54a18b-19f9-46f2-9866-7cefdd4c7506).

¹² *Postal Workers Are Dying in Heat Waves. It's Only Going To Get Hotter*, Huffington Post (July 15, 2020) (online at www.huffpost.com/entry/postal-workers-heat-waves-climate-change_n_5efcc1ddc5b6ca9709180c2d).

¹³ *Id.*

For these reasons, we request that the Postal Service provide answers to the following questions by July 21, 2023:

1. What measures does the Postal Service currently have in place to address heat-related risks to mail carriers?
2. How does the Postal Service decide to adjust when letter carriers must begin their delivery route in light of risks such as extreme heat?
3. How many requests were submitted in the past 12 months by letter carriers or employee unions to adjust delivery times to avoid high heat indexes or other extreme heat conditions?
 - a) To what routes did these requests pertain?
 - b) How did the Postal Service review and respond to these requests?
 - c) Has the Postal Service denied any such requests? If so, what reasons were provided?
4. What are the Postal Service's justifications for not allowing letter carriers to begin delivery times earlier in the day to avoid rising heat indexes or other extreme heat conditions?
5. Will the Postal Service prioritize vehicle repair and replacement in areas where dangerous and extreme weather conditions have the potential to affect letter carriers' safety?

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

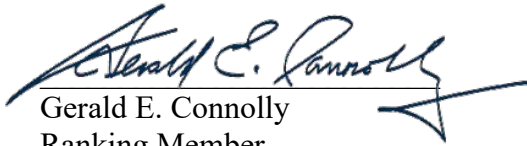
Sincerely,



Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member



Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity,
Information Technology, and
Government Innovation



Kweisi Mfume
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government
Operations and the Federal
Workforce



Katie Porter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health Care and
Financial Services




Cori Bush
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Growth,
Energy, and Regulatory Affairs



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security,
the Border, and Foreign Affairs



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Stephen Lynch
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Shontel Brown
Member of Congress

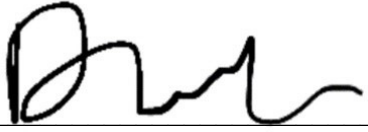


Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress

The Honorable Louis DeJoy
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Goldman', written over a horizontal line.

Dan Goldman
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman