

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 25, 2020

Louis DeJoy
Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer
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Washington, D.C. 20260

Justin Glass
Director of Election Mail Operations
United States Postal Service
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Charles W. Scholz
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Illinois State Board of Elections
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Ian K. Linnabary
Vice Chair
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Dear Postmaster General DeJoy, Director Glass, Chair Scholz, Vice Chair Linnabary, and Executive Director Sandvoss:

We appreciate that staff from the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the Illinois State Board of Elections (SBOE) joined us in a call last week to discuss concerns that our constituents have raised about how they can safely vote by mail and ensure that their ballots are counted in the upcoming general election.

As you know, we are in the middle of a pandemic that has taken more than 173,000 American lives and resulted in more than 5.55 million COVID-19 cases across the nation. As we approach the November 3 general election, voting by mail will be a critical tool that will permit constituents in our state and throughout the country to both participate in our democracy and protect their health by avoiding further exposure to COVID-19.

As we discussed on the call, in Illinois, election authorities will begin sending mail-in ballots to voters who have requested them on September 24. Under Illinois law, voters can continue to request a mail-in ballot up to five days before the November general election. Voters must ensure that their ballot is postmarked by November 3 and their local election authority must receive their ballot within 14 days after Election Day for it to be counted.

However, Director Glass recommended on the call that Illinois voters should request ballots as early as possible and no later than October 19, which marks 15 days before the election. Director Glass also recommended that Illinois voters planning to return their ballot by

mail should send back their completed ballots no later than October 27, which marks seven days before the election.

According to both the USPS and SBOE officials on the call, adhering to these USPS recommendations will give Illinois voters the best chance of ensuring that their ballots are counted. SBOE officials also noted that Illinois voters will be able to check on the status of their mailed ballots with their local election authorities and that, under Illinois law, election authorities will contact voters to address any problems that are discovered with completed ballots, such as a missing signature.

Additionally, SBOE officials discussed that they plan to engage in a significant statewide media campaign to reach voters and lay out the options available for casting a ballot, including voting by mail, early voting, and voting on Election Day. Under this plan, SBOE will encourage voters who are seeking to reduce their potential exposure to COVID-19 to vote by mail and to submit their applications and completed ballots as soon as possible.

While we are encouraged by the efforts that SBOE is taking to ensure that our constituents in Illinois—from all political persuasions—are able to safely and successfully participate in the election, we remain deeply concerned about the detrimental changes at USPS that have led to significant delays in mail delivery and necessitated this conversation.

USPS officials on the call repeatedly assured us that regional and state facilities have the capacity and staff to ensure that the agency will be able to handle any increased volume due to election mail. We urge USPS to take all steps necessary, including providing additional staffing and overtime and utilizing all available machinery, to ensure that election mail is processed as expeditiously as possible between now and the general election.

We also remain concerned about the assertion from USPS officials on the call that it is a mere, discretionary practice to treat election mail as First-Class Mail. We were encouraged to hear that Postmaster General DeJoy asserted in his testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Accountability Committee on Friday that USPS will deploy “processes and procedures to advance the election mail, in some cases ahead of first-class mail.” However, we urge USPS to immediately enact an official policy to ensure that all vote-by-mail applications, ballots, and related election mail be treated as First-Class Mail, even if election authorities send such mail with Marketing Mail postage.

Thank you again for your time and efforts to ensure that all Americans are able to exercise their right to vote safely and successfully in the upcoming general election. We ask that USPS provide a response to our requests related to expeditious processing and a First-Class Mail policy by August 31.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator