

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 27, 2015

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to ask that you assess the interaction between the United States Postal Service's (USPS) recent operational changes and broadband access in rural communities. Broadband has been a disruptive technology that has allowed people to communicate anytime from anywhere for both personal and professional reasons. But too many rural communities in this country still lack adequate access to broadband, and they rely on the USPS for their global connectivity. Without efficient and effective service from the USPS, rural Americans are put at a significant economic and personal disadvantage.

Declining mail volumes have forced the USPS to restructure its infrastructure in order to continue providing affordable and reliable postal services in all areas of the nation. It has consolidated hundreds of mail processing facilities, reduced operating hours at thousands of postal retail facilities, and reduced delivery service standards, all of which have resulted in slower and more inconsistent mail delivery. The planning and execution of the USPS' restructuring have raised some troubling questions and had a disproportionate impact on the nation's rural communities.

Generally, citizens in rural areas have fewer communication and delivery alternatives to traditional mail delivery. In fact, while access to, and use of, broadband services has grown significantly as an alternative to some traditional mail services, the FCC reported in 2015 that over half of rural Americans lack access to the FCC's standard for broadband service.

At this time, however, the relationship between access to broadband services and the availability of postal services has not been studied. As a result, there is little information to drive USPS' actions or assess the impact of them on these communities and their ability to stay connected in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.

We would like GAO to assess the impact of USPS' recent operational changes on rural communities' global connectivity. Specifically, we would like GAO to identify:

1. How does the availability of postal (retail) and broadband services to households or residential customers in rural areas compare to their availability in non-rural areas?
2. To what extent, has the availability of these services in rural areas improved or not over the past 5 years?
3. What do these trends indicate for USPS' future plans for mail delivery changes?

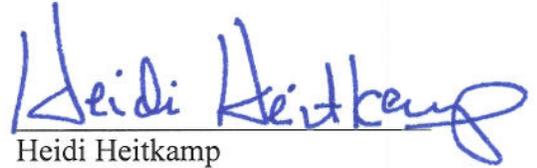
Having this information is critical to allow the USPS, Postal Regulatory Commission and Congress to better understand, anticipate and address how any changes in the availability of postal services could affect customers in different areas.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Please contact Charlie Moskowitz in Sen. McCaskill's office at (202) 228-6471 or Ashley Poling in Sen. Heitkamp's office at (202) 224-4664 with any questions about this request.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill  
United States Senator



Heidi Heitkamp  
United States Senator