

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON

HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

January 23, 2018

CHRISTOPHER R. HIXON, STAFF DIRECTOR  
MARGARET E. DAUM, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

Tammy Whitcomb  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General  
1735 N. Lynn Street  
Arlington, VA 22209

Dear Ms. Whitcomb:

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is conducting oversight of mail security, including examining efforts of the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Postal Service to stop illegal drugs from being mailed to the United States. I write to request that your office examine the impact of the U.S. Postal Service's network, policies, and practices in identifying and preventing illicit drug distribution through the mail, and report vulnerabilities within its systems.

The opioid crisis in this country has reached epidemic proportions. In 2016, over 64,000 Americans died from drug overdoses, with the largest number of deaths involving synthetic opioids.<sup>1</sup> More Americans died from drug overdoses in 2016 than died from HIV/AIDS at the height of that epidemic.<sup>2</sup> The death toll from synthetic opioids rose 540% from 2014 to 2016.<sup>3</sup>

The opioid crisis is aided, in part, by the ability to buy and sell illicit drugs online and have the drugs delivered to a location of the buyer's choosing. There are now resources, readily available online, that specifically instruct individuals on how to ship illicit drugs through the mail, including ways to exploit vulnerabilities. In addition, I have learned your office is handling an increasing number of narcotics investigations where postal employees are or may be trafficking illicit drugs.<sup>4</sup>

The use of the Postal Service's network to import and distribute illicit drugs puts the Postal Service, its employees, and the public at risk. To assist in my ongoing efforts to identify

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Overdose Death Rates* (Sept. 2017) ([www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates](http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates)).

<sup>2</sup> *Drug Overdoses Killed More Americans Last Year Than the Vietnam War*, CBS NEWS (Oct. 17, 2017) ([www.cbsnews.com/news/opioids-drug-overdose-killed-more-americans-last-year-than-the-vietnam-war/](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/opioids-drug-overdose-killed-more-americans-last-year-than-the-vietnam-war/)).

<sup>3</sup> *The First Count of Fentanyl Deaths in 2016: Up 540% in Three Years*, The New York Times (Sept. 2, 2017) ([www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/02/upshot/fentanyl-drug-overdose-deaths.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/02/upshot/fentanyl-drug-overdose-deaths.html)).

<sup>4</sup> Materials on file with Committee (Dec. 18, 2017).

ways to address this multifaceted problem, I request that you examine the role of the Postal Service network in facilitating illicit drug distribution, explore the risks and vulnerabilities in postal network systems, and identify opportunities to mitigate those risks. Specifically, I ask that you:

1. Address differences among laws, regulations, and procedures governing the Postal Service and private carriers that may make the Postal Service susceptible to illicit drug trafficking;
2. Review current efforts to screen packages for illicit drugs shipped through the Postal Service, including how the Postal Service, global logistics firms, and other shipping organizations share data and any challenges they face; and,
3. Describe the limitations and vulnerabilities in the Postal Service's network and postal policies, including: constraints on the quantity, reliability, and use of data to detect illicit drugs, employee involvement and collusion in drug trafficking, as well as efforts to mitigate this vulnerability, and requirements associated with Commercial Mail Receiving Agencies (CMRAs), along with the Postal Service's oversight of CMRAs.

If you have any questions please contact Charlie Moskowitz with my staff at (202) 224-6351 or [Charlie\\_Moskowitz@hsgac.senate.gov](mailto:Charlie_Moskowitz@hsgac.senate.gov). Please send any official correspondence related to this request to Lucy Balcezak at [Lucy\\_Balcezak@hsgac.senate.gov](mailto:Lucy_Balcezak@hsgac.senate.gov). Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill  
Ranking Member

cc: Ron Johnson  
Chairman