



October 7, 2020

CHIEF RETAIL & DELIVERY OFFICERS, DISTRICT MANAGERS, and POSTMASTERS

SUBJECT: Retail and Delivery Guidance on Postmarking Ballots October 2020

With the 2020 General Election fast approaching, the intent of this Service Talk is to clarify a few procedures concerning the postmarking of ballots.

### **Command Center**

Retail and Delivery Operations has recently established a dedicated, cross-functional Command Center team at Headquarters. The Command Center's mission is to provide guidance and answer questions the Field has related to Election Mail and ballot handling. Contact the Command Center immediately if you encounter a situation involving Election Mail (including postmarks) that is not directly addressed in this Service Talk.

For example, you should contact the Command Center if you:

- Are contacted by a Board of Election, including if a Board of Election (or an Election Official) returns a tray of ballots and asks you to postmark the ballots;
- Get postmarking questions from a specific mailer;
- Need clarification around the Postal Operations Manual (POM);
- Need help answering a customer's question; or
- Have questions about Election/Political Mail logs.

You can reach the Command Center at 1-877-672-0007.

### **Retail Units**

Retail Unit Employees at Post Offices, stations, and branches must accept custody of any ballots presented to them at a Retail Window by a customer. If any such customers ask to have the ballots postmarked, Retail Unit Employees *must* hand-cancel the ballots. This service is authorized for all mailpieces presented at retail under Postal Service policy, is to be provided free of charge, and is to be provided regardless of the postage-payment indicia on the mailpiece (stamp, meter strip, precancelled stamp, Business Reply Mail, etc.). Retail employees may use the round dater to perform requested postmarks. A zero meter Postage Validation Imprinter (PVI) label is also appropriate if the PVI is from an authorized unit. The date applied should *always* be the current date that the customer presented the mailpiece; DO NOT "backdate" the postmark. Do not tray ballots; all ballots should be tendered loose in collection mail to mail processing facilities.

### **Delivery Units That Receive Mailpieces that Have Gone Through Mail Processing**

The Postal Service's policy is to make every effort to postmark all ballots mailed by voters, and we take this policy very seriously. We have taken significant steps this year to strengthen the

postmarking process. For mailpieces that have arrived at a Delivery Unit after processing, the Delivery Unit should not alter the ballot envelope in any way.

This means that, in the rare instances where a ballot goes through processing and arrives at a Delivery Unit without a postmark or without a legible postmark, Delivery Unit employees must NOT postmark the ballot. This is because the postmark contains the Postal Service's official representation of the date on which the Postal Service accepted custody of the mailpiece, and there is no way for Delivery Units to make that determination at such a late stage. Applying a postmark with an inaccurate date undermines the integrity of the postmark and the credibility of the Postal Service.

Accordingly, if a ballot that has gone through processing is found with a missing or illegible postmark at a Delivery Unit, including when casing mail, during Business Reply Mail processing, or at caller service, take the following actions:

- **Do not round-date the ballot**, for the reasons described above.
- **Do not delay delivery.**
- Call the Command Center immediately, at 1-877-672-0007 for guidance and deliver the ballot.
- **Document the issue in your Election/Political Mail log.**

We understand that, at or near Election Day, there are authorized units that accept custody of ballots and deliver those ballots locally. Further guidance will be forthcoming for such units on October 20, 2020. In the meantime, such units should call the Command Center immediately for guidance upon acceptance

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