

Crimes against letter carriers



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In this month's article, I will be touching on the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on serious crime on postal employees. As we know, life has changed for letter carriers. A dog attack used to be the biggest concern for us out on our assignments. Now, we are looking over our shoulders because we have increasingly become targets for serious crimes by thieves and other bad actors.

GAO provides Congress and federal agencies with objective, nonpartisan, fact-based information. In May 2024, GAO issued a report on serious crime on postal

employees based off a review from United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) data.

Among other things, USPIS, the law enforcement arm of the Postal Service, is charged with protecting USPS employees and property against crimes, including robbery, burglary, assault and homicide.

According to the GAO report, the most common type of serious crime¹ cases opened by USPIS in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 were robbery cases, with about 600 reported cases. About 90 percent of these robbery cases were of city letter carriers. Inspectors also have opened about 400 assault cases, 200 burglary cases and two homicide cases in response to deaths of on-duty postal employees during that same period. The report indicated cases of serious crime have increased almost every year from FY 2017 through FY 2023.

Despite the increase in serious crimes from FY 2017 through FY 2023, the authorized postal inspector workforce has not increased.

Law enforcement personnel, comprised of postal inspectors and postal police, make up 70 percent of the USPIS workforce. As of September 2023, Inspection officials said that it employed 1,228 postal inspectors, which is 14 percent less than the authorized total of 1,431, and 367 postal police, which is 37 percent less than the authorized level of 581. USPIS officials told GAO that it determines the size and location of its postal police workforce by conducting a security force assess-

ment. Unbelievably, the most recent assessment was completed in 2011, and Inspection officials said that its primary goal of the 2011 assessment was to meet a USPS deadline to reduce the number of authorized postal police. The results of the assessment reduced the total number of authorized postal police from 694 to 581. GAO found that, since 2011, USPS has met conditions that require a new security force assessment.

Based on the GAO report, the Postal Service is relying on outdated information to protect its facilities and its employees, with letter carriers out on the street being the most vulnerable of them all. USPS law enforcement personnel are severely understaffed and completely incapable of policing the rise in serious crimes committed against us.

Properly staffing the USPIS is a vital factor for improving carrier safety; however, it is only part of the answer to the problem we face today. I believe USPS has the technology to help deter some of the attacks letter carriers are experiencing today, but that it is not moving fast enough to put them to use. Many of the robberies committed against carriers are focused on stealing the Arrow Keys that we use to perform our duties. The GAO report indicated that Arrow Keys in narrative descriptions of robbery cases have increased from 10 percent in FY 2017 to about 51 percent in FY 2023.

In a news release on May 12, 2023, the USPS and USPIS announced a joint initiative called Project Safe Delivery to combat the rise in mail theft and carrier robberies. Prevention efforts in this initiative include the rollout of high security collection boxes (HSCB), electronic Arrow Locks (eLocks), and Modified Arrow Lock (MAL) Keys in areas with high incidents of mail theft. The HSCB will eventually replace the less secure traditional blue collection boxes that have also become a target for theft, while the eLocks will replace some traditional Arrow Locks on mail receptacles and require dual authentication before opening. As of May 2024, USPS has installed 21,191 HSCBs and 34,143 eLocks across the country.

There are approximately 140,000 traditional collection boxes in use by USPS nationwide and they aren't being secured fast enough. The same goes for replacing the hundreds of thousands of traditional Arrow Locks across the country with eLocks and replacing 360,000 traditional Arrow Keys in use with MAL Keys or safer alternatives.

USPS needs to do more to protect every carrier on duty. I sincerely hope it gives the GAO report the attention it requires, and that letter carriers deserve. Please be safe.

¹ GAO refers to burglaries, robberies, assaults and homicides as "serious crime."