

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 21, 2020

Mr. Louis DeJoy
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20260

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Postmaster General DeJoy and Secretary Perdue,

We write to share significant concerns about recent issues with United States Postal Service (USPS) delivery of live day-old chicks. USPS is the only carrier that will deliver chicks from hatcheries to local, independent poultry producers and has been an essential and reliable partner for rural America since it first began providing this service over 100 years ago.

Unfortunately, we have heard alarming reports that recent shipments of live chicks via USPS have been severely delayed or mishandled, resulting in significant mortality losses. For example, one hatchery recently reported that a shipment of 4,800 chicks arrived in New England with 100 percent mortality losses. This is but one example of a new, systemic issue arising this season.

Mortality losses from delays and mishandling are not only hugely problematic from an animal welfare perspective, but have also taken an emotional toll on the recipients, many of whom are families building a backyard flock or children raising birds for 4-H or Future Farmers of America (FFA) projects. For these families, receiving chicks in the mail is a longstanding tradition, and with family farms in America already struggling to keep younger generations engaged and interested in agriculture, these negative experiences could significantly undermine those efforts.

These recent issues have also caused substantial financial hardship for both farms and hatcheries. Hatcheries in multiple states have reported spending thousands of dollars to refund or replace orders for customers. The losses have been so significant that some growers have begun driving across state lines to transport chicks from the hatchery to the farm themselves, at significant personal expense. These growers and small businesses have already been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and cannot continue to shoulder this additional burden, particularly as they are largely ineligible for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) COVID-19 relief programs.

We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for USPS and its workforce and are grateful for the continued service of these essential workers. However, we are deeply concerned that the recent issues with live chick deliveries may have been significantly exacerbated by recent changes to USPS service that have led to mail delays and staffing challenges.

Specifically, we request responses to the following questions:

1. It has been reported that Postmaster General DeJoy recently instituted several policy changes, including limiting overtime for USPS personnel and reducing hours at USPS facilities. How have these changes affected the safe and timely delivery of chicks?

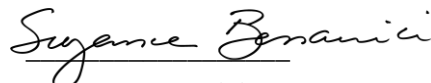
2. Given the special handling considerations for live animals, were these shipments considered when implementing these new policies? If not, why not?
3. Following the August 18 announcement that further changes to USPS service will be halted until November, will USPS take any action to undo recent changes that may have negatively impacted the safe and timely delivery of chicks? If not, why not?
4. What guidance, if any, has USDA provided to USPS on proper handling of shipments containing chicks or other live animals?
5. What training, if any, does USPS provide to its workforce, including contractors, on proper handling of shipments containing chicks or other live animals?

We urge USPS and USDA to thoroughly investigate this issue and promptly rectify any policy that is contributing to this problem. Rural Americans, including agricultural producers, disproportionately rely on USPS for their livelihoods, and it is essential that they receive reliable service. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



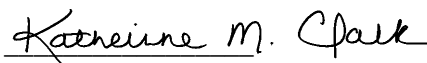
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress



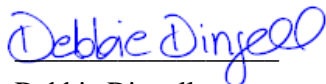
David N. Cicilline
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Katherine M. Clark
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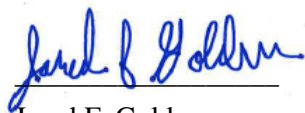
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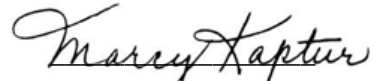


Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress




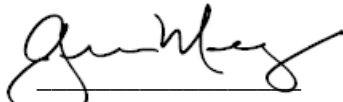
Jared Huffman
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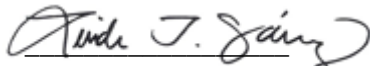

Marcy Kaptur
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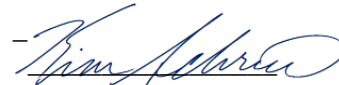

Ann McLane Kuster
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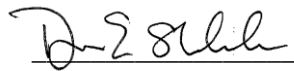

James P. McGovern
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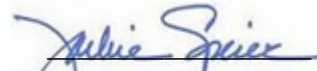

Grace Meng
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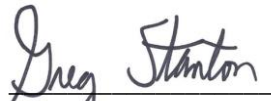

Lucille Roybal-Allard
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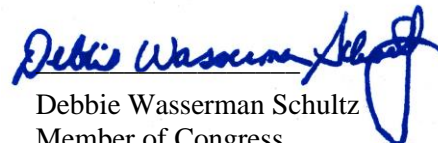

Linda T. Sánchez
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