

August 7, 2003

John E. Potter
Postmaster General
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Mr. Potter:

We recently learned that the United States Postal Service (USPS) is conducting a nationwide assessment of the deployment of Postal Police Officers and has decided to terminate use of this security force at the first six facilities surveyed, including those in Hartford, Connecticut and Seattle, Washington, even before the entire survey process is completed. We are writing to express our concern about the implications these actions have for the security of USPS employees, customers and the mail itself at the more than two dozen facilities affected by this ongoing review and to request that you suspend the currently planned re-deployments and terminations until the entire survey is completed and a comprehensive response plan is prepared. In addition, we are writing to request further specific information regarding the objectives and procedures that are being used by the USPS and the US Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) in conducting this assessment and the security needs of the affected facilities.

Postal Police Officers are valued postal employees who undergo months of federal law enforcement training. They serve many purposes including facility security, escorting high value cash transfers, responding rapidly to alarms, robberies, accidents and other crimes or situations involving postal employees and property, and deterring untold numbers of other incidents. It is our understanding the USPS intends to replace these officers with unarmed contractor employees and additional physical security devices such as barriers, closed circuit televisions and alarms.

We are very troubled by the fact that before surveys were completed for all 26 affected facilities, a decision was made to terminate Postal Police Officer assignments for all of the first six facilities surveyed and to redeploy these positions to facilities for which surveys had not yet been conducted, including the L'Enfant Plaza headquarters facility here in Washington. If the purpose of the assessment is to objectively determine how best to deploy or redeploy security resources throughout the USPS, then it should be used to do so and not simply to provide an excuse for moving resources to pre-determined locations.

Especially in the wake of the 2001 terrorist and anthrax attacks, it is incumbent upon the USPS to reassess the security of the postal system. Such an assessment, however, must be based on realistic and objective criteria and data. It is not at all clear that the current assessment process is either realistic or objective and may, in fact, result in lowering the level of security at major postal facilities. For example, the current assessments do not consistently rely on or examine the number of criminal incidents that have occurred in each area in the previous two years, contrary to the recommendations of the USPIS 2001 Security Assessment Report.

It is doubtful that the measures USPIS intends to use to replace the current postal police presence would provide a comparable level of security for postal employees and customers. According to a physical security assessment initiated by the USPIS in 2001, the assessment team “found significant deficiencies at almost every site” and “(a)t a majority of sites, the team found that individuals had defeated security systems by wiring gates to remain open and propping open facility doors, either temporarily or permanently, against regulations.” In light of this finding, it is unclear why USPIS is proposing to increase reliance on electronic security and access control systems which the assessment found ineffective. The proposed use of unarmed private security guards also raises questions regarding their lack of appropriate training and background checks, as does the effect the removal of postal police will have on incident response times.

A number of the 6 facilities at which the Postal Police presence is slated to be eliminated are in high crime areas, including the Hartford and Jacksonville, FL facilities. According to a July 22 article in the *Hartford Courant*, the neighborhoods surrounding the Hartford facility have experienced a significant increase in gun-related assaults so far this year and the Hartford Police Department has recently reassigned 20 officers and detectives to this area. Although the USPIS assessment process identifies the fact that facilities like Hartford and Jacksonville are in high-crime areas, the methodology used by the USPIS gives only minimal consideration to what logically should be a significant factor. The assessment methodology also fails to fully consider the number and type of incidents within the postal facilities to which Postal Police Officers actually respond. In fact, the survey methodology does not even collect data on incident response reports actually filed by Postal Police Officers.

Given the tragedy of the September 11th and the anthrax terrorist events, cities like Seattle have been on heightened alert for future terrorist attacks. The FBI and other national law enforcement agencies worked with local police to arrest Ahmed Ressam in Washington state as he was planning a terrorist attack. We can only believe that Seattle and other major U.S. cities will face the continuing threat of terrorism; therefore we are concerned that the Postal Service seems to be eliminating law enforcement measures at a time of greatest need to protect our citizens from possible terrorism.

With regard to the ongoing assessment, the USPIS has claimed that the changes are based upon a review of the security needs at these facilities. As discussed above, it does not appear that the assessment process is truly an accurate assessment of the security needs of these facilities. We are therefore requesting a complete account of the Postal Service’s review and decision-making process. Please provide the following information by August 10, 2003:

1. Section 720 of the Postal Inspection Service Manual states that “(o)n-site surveys are conducted by each division on a fiscal year basis every two years where a Security Force is currently installed.” Please provide copies of the two previous surveys for each of the six facilities where USPIS has decided to close the security force facilities – Buffalo, NY, Hartford, CT, Birmingham, AL, Jacksonville, FL, Denver, CO and Seattle, WA – and the two most recent surveys for all other sites with a Postal Police security force.
2. For each of the six postal police facilities proposed to be closed, provide the documentation or other information from local police departments indicating the level of crime in the area surrounding each facility and used to determine the “threat factor” in the survey and the response time used to determine “police coverage” in the survey.
3. For each of the six facilities proposed to be closed, please state what steps you took to determine the impact of terminating postal police on each local police department, including its ability to compensate for this change and respond in a timely manner to calls for assistance. For each of the six facilities, please provide all documentation or other information you relied on to make this determination.
4. Describe the legal jurisdiction and limitations of local law enforcement officials to respond to, arrest, and investigate incidents on USPS property or within USPS facilities.
5. Provide a summary of incident reports filed by Postal Police Officers for each facility at which they are currently deployed for each of the past three years. Please summarize these reports by category or type of incident and indicate the number of incidents reported for each category or type of incident.
6. USPIS reports in its FY2002 Annual Report that it has prepared a security force transformation plan and that phase 1 of the plan was completed in January 2003. USPIS has provided three pages that are described as the portion of this document relating to the Security Force. Please provide the complete transformation plan, state when it was prepared and describe its impact on USPIS and USPS resources and operations.
7. At those facilities where Postal Police presence is proposed to be terminated, USPIS proposes to substitute contract security personnel, increased physical security measures and coverage by Postal Inspectors. For each of the facilities surveyed to date, describe the effect of termination on 24 hour/seven day per week incident response time, Postal Inspector work load, and emergency response capability (i.e. assault or theft, hazardous material, fire, explosive device, bioterrorism event).
8. For each facility where Postal Police presence is proposed to be terminated, please describe the new security plan, including the number of armed or unarmed contract security personnel and how they will be deployed, what physical security devices currently exist, and how those physical security measures will be monitored. For physical security devices that will be added, please describe such devices and state when they will be in place and operational.

9. In August 2002 the USPS and USPIS jointly developed a “Facilities Security Database” intended to “evaluate security levels at postal facilities and assist managers in planning future security needs.” Describe how this database is being used to assess the security needs for major postal facilities, in general, and for the ongoing review of the more than two dozen facilities currently staffed by Postal Police Officers.

We look forward to your responses on these issues. Please feel free to contact Susan Propper of Senator Lieberman’s staff at (202) 224-2627 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman

Sen. Christopher J. Dodd

Sen. Maria Cantwell

Sen. Patty Murray

Rep. John B. Larson

Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro