

January 20, 2026

The Honorable David P. Steiner
The Postmaster General of the United States
U.S. Postal Service Headquarters
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW Room 4012
Washington, DC 20260-2200

RE: Civil Rights Coalition Letter Requesting USPS Processing and Postmark Practice Changes

Dear Postmaster Steiner:

On behalf of the undersigned civil rights, civic engagement, and community-based organizations, we write to thank the United States Postal Service (USPS) in advance for providing greater clarity regarding postmarks through the final rule adding Section 608.11, “Postmarks and Postal Possession,” to the Domestic Mail Manual ([FR Doc. 2025-20740](#)).

We understand that this rule is intended to “improve public understanding of postmarks and their relationship to the date of mailing,” and that it does not formally change postal operations or postmarking practices. Transparency and public education are essential, and we acknowledge the importance of clear guidance in an evolving mail-processing environment.

However, this step by the USPS raises concern about whether it could contribute to broader challenges affecting equitable access to the voting process. The clarification itself reveals a significant and urgent access issue, one that has profound implications for voting rights, economic security, and access to justice, particularly for Black communities, college students, active-duty military families, veterans, and other historically underserved populations.

As USPS noted in the final rule, the Postal Service received 130 public comments on the Proposed Rule, approximately 80 of which raised concerns, including:

- The dilution of the postmark’s meaning
- Impacts on rural and sparsely populated communities
- The importance of postmarks for mail-in ballots and documents subject to strict deadlines, such as tax returns

2 - Civil Rights Coalition Letter Requesting USPS Processing and Postmark Practice Changes

Despite these concerns being explicitly acknowledged in the Federal Register, it does not appear that civil rights organizations, voting rights groups, or communities most impacted by these changes were meaningfully engaged during the rulemaking process. The finalized rule does not sufficiently address the barriers raised by commenters, nor does it mitigate the real-world consequences for individuals who rely on the mail for time-sensitive civic and legal participation.

The USPS response to concerns about mail-in voting emphasizes that the agency does not administer elections or set election rules stating, “The Postal Service does not administer elections, establish the rules or deadlines that govern elections, or determine whether or how election jurisdictions utilize the mail or incorporate our postmark into their rules.” [\(FR Doc. 2025-20740\)](#)

While we understand the institutional role of USPS, the practical effect of the clarified postmark definition, combined with regional processing changes, is that the burden is shifted onto individual citizens to navigate increasingly complex mailing requirements to protect their rights.

Under current practices, individuals must now:

- Know to request a manual, hand-stamped postmark
- Anticipate processing delays beyond their control
- Pay for additional services such as Certified Mail or Certificates of Mailing for added protection

These requirements create a barrier to entry for voters, taxpayers, and community members with limited time, resources, transportation, or access to information.

When ballots are rejected due to postmark timing, when tax filings are deemed late, or when legal documents miss deadlines, the consequences are severe: loss of voting power; financial penalties; legal harm, and erosion of trust in public institutions. These harms disproportionately affect Black communities, low-income households, active-duty military families, veterans, seniors, college students, people with disabilities, and those living in rural or underserved areas.

This is not merely a matter of individual responsibility; it is a systems issue with civil rights implications.

We stand together as a coalition to raise the alarm. At the same time, we urge USPS to take the next step beyond clarification.

Specifically, we advocate for a rule or operational requirement that makes the USPS long-standing “common-sense” guidance a standard practice at retail locations and that USPS begin broadly educating our communities on any final procedural changes. We urge USPS to require retail postal locations to proactively offer and apply manual postmarks for time-sensitive mail, particularly ballots and legal documents, without placing the burden on customers to know to ask.

We understand that USPS wishes to provide transparency and a greater understanding of long-standing processes. However, the clarification underscores the need for further action and broad community education to ensure that postal practices support, rather than hinder, access to democracy, economic security, and justice for all communities.

3 - Civil Rights Coalition Letter Requesting USPS Processing and Postmark Practice Changes

We welcome continued dialogue and partnership to address these concerns, expand public education, and explore policy solutions that better align postal operations with the realities faced by the communities we serve.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

National Council Negro Women
National Action Network
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Urban League
National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

cc: Senior Leadership, United States Postal Service