

Mary Ann Simpson  
Western States Government Relations Liaison Director  
United States Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington DC 20260-0010

November 16, 2023

Ms. Simpson:

The United States Postal Service has been a valued and trusted partner as Washington state has developed and improved vote-by-mail elections. Maintaining this relationship will be a top state priority for many years to come, which is why I am writing to express deep concern about the discovery that ballots from the November 7, 2023, General Election remained in USPS collection boxes until well after Election Day. This situation must lead to urgent systemic improvements.

Washington has five scheduled elections in 2024, starting in February and including the Presidential Primary in March. In my role as the state's chief elections officer, I must ensure that counties have all resources necessary to administer elections and maintain the public's confidence in our democratic process. Both capacities require a healthy relationship between the Office of Secretary of State and the USPS. Washington's state, county, and local governments invest millions of dollars each year in postage for ballots, voter pamphlets, registration materials, and returned ballots to be delivered securely, efficiently, and effectively.

The delayed discovery of at least 124 voters' ballots in USPS collection boxes in public spaces in King and Pierce counties undercut a foundational tenet of our vote-by-mail architecture. Every Washington voter needs to be able to trust that a mailed ballot is a voted ballot. It is unacceptable that voted ballots placed in USPS receptacles went undelivered for so long. Leaving disused collection boxes in public spaces during an election creates a potential disenfranchisement.

Please advise me, as soon as possible, of all steps USPS is taking to prevent such a situation from arising in future election cycles and ensure every ballot put into a USPS collection box is delivered in a timely fashion. Please also notify me if any resources of the Office of the Secretary of State could help facilitate these improvements. Our agencies must credibly assure the public that no similar circumstances will interfere with future vote-by-mail elections.

This point of failure was brought to light by voters who reached out after mailed ballots did not show up in ballot tracking mechanisms, which my office provides to voters statewide via [VoteWA.gov](https://VoteWA.gov) as a transparency measure. While we are grateful for their vigilance, we owe them the assurance that the secure delivery of each ballot matters as much to our institutions as it does to the person who filled it out.

Washington was among the first states in the nation to invest in postage-paid ballot return envelopes statewide, and our state and county elections officials remain committed to being good partners for USPS. The 2023 General Election presented multiple unexpected challenges to the Election Mail protocols USPS and our elections teams have developed over many years of successful, and much-appreciated collaboration. I am confident that the USPS and my office can learn from these experiences and deliver the reliability required of every aspect of the elections system every time ballots go out.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns. Please reach out to my office directly if we can provide further information or assistance to help achieve all necessary improvements.

Sincerely,



Steven R. Hobbs  
Washington Secretary of State  
360-902-4151