United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 26, 2011

Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Mr. Donahoe:

We are writing to express our concern that the United States Postal Service (USPS) has commenced an aggressive nationwide effort to close rural and small town post offices. While the USPS faces significant financial challenges, we believe that post offices provide fundamental social and economic benefits, particularly to rural communities. We would like to be provided a detailed breakdown and analysis of the objective criteria used to determine which local post offices to close, documentation of the Congressional notification process as well as your notification and response to community input when the USPS is considering closures.

Each of our offices have received numerous inquiries from individual constituents, local businesses, and elected community leaders about the lack of community involvement and notification in the closure and consolidation process; members of the affected communities often lack clear information about how their post offices have been selected for closure or consolidation as well as how their access to USPS services will be impacted by closures and consolidations.

As you know, the USPS is required under 39 U.S.C. 3661 to request an advisory opinion from the Postal Regulatory Commission ("the Commission") prior to any nationwide change in service. Title 39 U.S.C. 101(b) requires the USPS to provide the maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns where post offices are not self-sustaining. Moreover, it is the specific intent of Congress to ensure effective postal services to residents of both urban and rural communities.

Rural citizens depend on the mail to manage their lives and stay connected with their government. A 2011 Commerce Department study report shows that 32 percent of U.S. households did not have broadband Internet access at home, and 28 percent of households did not even use the Internet. Postal mail remains the one universal service connecting the American people to commerce, government, news, and social and civic institutions.

The USPS has informed our offices and numerous articles have appeared in the press identifying facilities in a number of states that have been closed, are being evaluated for potential closure, or will be evaluated for potential closure or consolidation. As a result, it appears that the USPS is already engaged in a nationwide change in service without requesting an advisory opinion from the Commission as Title 39 requires.

Therefore, we ask the USPS to promptly provide the Commission a state-by-state list of retail postal locations being considered for closure or consolidation, whether it be by local, regional or national postal management. Additionally, we ask that the USPS promptly request an advisory opinion from the Commission on nationwide changes in service being implemented and the impacts of closing retail facilities on communities as Title 39 requires. This will allow all affected stakeholders to conduct a meaningful, informed and productive dialogue on appropriate responses to the Postal Service's significant financial challenges.

Thank you for your consideration and attention.

Sincerely,

Senator Jon Tester

Senator Mark Pryor

Senator Mark Begich

Senator Claire McCaskill

Cc: Chairman Ruth Y. Goldway
Vice Chairman Mark Acton
Commissioner Nanci E. Langley
Commissioner Tony Hammond