

Durbin Examines How USPS Changes Have Affected At-risk Communities In Getting Medications Delivered By Mail

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today sent a letter to a group of Illinois organizations—representing hundreds of thousands of seniors, patients with disabilities and complex conditions, and health care providers—asking how the recent United States Postal Service (USPS) changes have affected or may affect at-risk communities in getting prescription medications delivered by mail. In a letter to the Illinois chapter of the AARP, Illinois State Medical Society, Illinois Health and Hospital Association, the Illinois HomeCare & Hospice Council, Access Living, Illinois Association for Behavioral Health, Affordable Assisted Living Coalition, and Illinois Primary Health Care Association, Durbin asked for information to better understand how USPS changes and service reductions have impacted the populations these organizations serve and to understand the scope of the challenges in Illinois communities. USPS handles 1.2B prescription drug shipments per year—which are particularly important for seniors, the disabled, veterans, and rural patients who may face barriers going to a pharmacy, even in normal times.

“Without reliable access to their medications, I worry about the health and safety of Illinoisans and Americans across the country who rely on mail-order prescriptions and

other medical deliveries,” Durbin wrote. “Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase of Americans receiving medications by mail instead of entering a pharmacy, one recent study found that mail-order prescriptions have jumped 21 percent this March compared to the same period last year.”

To better understand the scope of the challenges and potential impact on the populations these organizations serve, I request information—including member surveys, specific anecdotes or stories, clinical assessments, or other relevant information—to help showcase the needs and challenges in our communities.

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

August 20, 2020

Dear :

Over the last several weeks, troubling reports have emerged about operational changes and service reductions at the United States Postal Service (USPS), which have impacted the ability of Americans to receive necessary medications safely and promptly by mail. Without reliable access to their medications, I worry about the health and safety of Illinoisans and Americans across the country who rely on mail-order prescriptions and other medical deliveries. I write to inquire about how recent USPS changes have affected or may impact the communities you serve.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), half of all Americans use a prescription drug in a given month, including more than 85 percent of seniors. A survey conducted by the National Community Pharmacists Association found that 20 percent of adults over 40 who take medication for a chronic condition receive it through the mail. Certain populations are much more reliant on postal deliveries for medications, such as seniors, veterans, persons with disabilities or in residential arrangements, and those in rural communities. I am deeply concerned with delays the USPS might be experiencing in delivering these life-saving medications for these patients.

For example, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) fills about 80 percent of veteran prescriptions by mail—nearly 120 million prescriptions per year—with deliveries arriving daily to about 330,000 veterans across the United States. Approximately 90 percent of these VA medical packages are delivered via USPS. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase of Americans receiving medications by mail instead of entering a pharmacy, one recent study found that mail-order prescriptions have jumped 21 percent this March compared to the same period last year. Overall, the USPS handles 1.2 billion prescription drug shipments a year—nearly 4 million each day.

Many patients have been delaying or cancelling routine health appointments due to COVID-19, which makes timely delivery of medications more important than ever before. I have received troubling reports from constituents who rely on mail-order prescriptions and are experiencing delays at USPS. One constituent wrote to me with concerns over her diabetes medication, which she gets a three-month supply per order. She has not received reliable mail deliveries for the past two months. Another constituent who has stage four cancer wrote to me with concerns over receiving his medication in the mail. The last time his medication went missing, he finally received his package after it had been sitting in the post office for six days.

To better understand the scope of the challenges and potential impact on the populations you serve, I request information—including member surveys, specific anecdotes or stories, clinical assessments, or other relevant information—to help showcase the needs and challenges in our communities. I hope your input can help me more fully understand how changes to USPS have affected Americans who rely on mail-order prescriptions. I look forward to working with you to address this growing concern.

Sincerely,