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Mail Theft Has Become a National Crisis — and the Postal Inspection Service Is Missing in Action

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The author calls for the creation of a national mail and package theft fusion center, with participation from USPIS, USPS OIG, the FBI, local law enforcement, and major delivery and financial institutions. Image: USPIS wanted poster. (https://www.uspis.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/HOU-Reward-Poster-Fort-Bend-Co.pdf)

By: Frank Albergo, Postal Police Officers Association

There are few institutions as quietly essential to American life as the U.S. Postal Service. It connects every home and business in the country, enables trillions of dollars in commerce (https://facts.usps.com/usps-core-of-industry/), and for generations has served as a pillar of civic trust. Which is why it is all the more alarming that this trust is now collapsing — not because of a natural disaster or a cyberattack — but because the agency tasked with protecting it has refused to do its job.

Mail theft in the United States is not merely rising — it has exploded (https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mail-theft-post-offices-fail-to-secure-universal-keys/?ftag=CNM-00-10aab6a&linkId=381599562&fbclid=IwQ0xDSwLgsydleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHgYc9dLmRGJ1cMeBGuke3M-bXNHL4bL1H4Xypzfl2kBslwYg3gz7N5XQ2N3u_aem_TYNSMcfYeXt2xa7OgnjR6w). Complaints have surged by over 300 percent in recent years. Robberies of letter carriers (https://www.gao.gov/blog/robberies-and-other-crimes-against-postal-service-workers-are-whats-being-done-about-it), often involving “arrow keys” that unlock entire neighborhoods of mailboxes, have increased by more than 800 percent. In 2024, over 58 million packages were stolen, costing somewhere between $5 billion and $16 billion. (https://www.wfmj.com/story/52781307/report-package-theft-costs-billions-requires-teamwork-to-fix)

And yet the U.S. Postal Inspection Service — the very agency entrusted with protecting the integrity of the mail — remains fundamentally unprepared and institutionally indifferent to the crisis it was specifically created to prevent.

Let’s start with the most basic failure: The Postal Inspection Service still lacks a centralized system to track mail and package theft. There is no national database, no real-time dashboard, and no meaningful coordination with local police, financial institutions, or private delivery companies navigating the same threats. There is no fusion center (https://www.dhs.gov/fusion-center-locations-and-contact-information). USPIS does not even have a distinct crime category for package theft — it continues to lump package theft together with letter mail theft (https://mailtheft.uspis.gov), making targeted prevention nearly impossible. In fact, in its 2025 report, Package Theft in the United States (https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2025-05/RISC-WP-25-002.pdf) — the USPS OIG had to rely on third-party surveys (such as SafeWise (https://www.safewise.com/blog/metro-areas-porch-theft/) and Capital One (https://capitaloneshopping.com/research/package-theft-statistics/)) just to estimate package theft rates — because the Inspection Service’s own data is so fragmented and incomplete.

By contrast, virtually every major agency dealing with complex and multi-jurisdictional threats — from terrorism to financial fraud —takes part in real-time intelligence-sharing fusion centers. There are more than 80 of these centers nationwide (https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/2021%20Fusion%20Centers%20Assessment%20Summary%20of%20Findings.pdf). The Postal Inspection Service does not operate a single one.

Fusion centers are the operational backbone of serious interagency collaboration — enabling a coordinated response across federal, state, and local jurisdictions. They are the institutional infrastructure that would turn USPIS "partnerships" from a buzzword into an operational reality. Without such a mechanism, there is no routine heat mapping for mail theft incidents, no geo-spatial modeling of attack clusters, and no daily intelligence briefings to identify emerging hotspots. Simply put, without a fusion center USPIS partnerships are symbolic at best — performative (https://www.uspis.gov/b-roll/federal-partnerships), not preventive.

Worse, the Inspection Service's own Mail Theft Analytics Program (MTAP) has proven utterly ineffective. The USPS OIG found (https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-10/22-178-r23.pdf) that USPIS had not established clear objectives or measurable outputs for MTAP contractors, and that investigators rarely use — or even receive — its referrals. Indeed, the OIG found that "only 22 of 1,984 (1 percent) active mail theft cases during FYs 2021 and 2022 were opened based on a referral from the MTAP." It's clear that the Inspection Service's approach to combating mail theft is not grounded in reliable data. Remarkably, in its official response to the OIG, the agency's primary defense was that only a "minuscule fraction" of its analytics program is dedicated to mail theft — effectively admitting that one of the Postal Service's most urgent crises is being treated as an afterthought.

So, what explains this failure? It is not a matter of funding. Nor is it technological incapacity. It is a failure of prioritization so complete that it now borders on institutional negligence.

The USPS OIG (https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-10/22-178-r23.pdf) and the Government Accountability Office (https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106497.pdf) have confirmed that the Inspection Service has no staffing benchmarks, no operational model for prevention, and no method to evaluate where its law enforcement resources are most needed. Earlier this year, the FBI (https://www.ic3.gov/PSA/2025/PSA250127) openly warned Americans not to send checks through the mail — a public vote of no confidence from one federal agency to another. It's hard to recall another instance in which such an alarm was sounded without any meaningful institutional response.

The implications are far from trivial. E-commerce is projected to grow from $1.22 trillion in 2024 to $1.88 trillion by 2029 (https://www.statista.com/statistics/272391/us-retail-e-commerce-sales-forecast/), with package volume rising by at least 25 percent. Yet the Postal Service is steadily losing control of the most critical step in that process: safe and secure last-mile delivery.

While the Postal Service promotes last-mile delivery (https://www.uspsdelivers.com/gaining-last-mile-supply-chain-visibility/) as a cornerstone of its Delivering for America plan (https://about.usps.com/what/strategic-plans/delivering-for-america/assets/USPS_Delivering-For-America.pdf) — the Inspection Service has failed to protect that very segment from a wave of criminal attack. This contradiction reveals a core weakness in the DFA strategy: it expands delivery capacity without safeguarding the infrastructure that gives that capacity meaning. A last-mile network is only as strong as the public's confidence in it. And if Americans no longer believe their mail will arrive safely, the fallout will extend far beyond the Postal Service — undermining commerce, eroding public trust in government, and disrupting the daily lives of millions of Americans who rely on the mail not as a convenience, but as a necessity.

And still, despite the scale of the mail theft crisis and the stakes for public trust, the Postal Inspection Service continues to sideline the one tool designed to prevent these crimes in the first place: the Postal Police Force.

Postal Police Officers — or PPOs — are federally trained (https://www.fleta.gov/programacademy/career-development-unit-cdu), fully equipped, and already assigned to the ZIP Codes with the highest rates of mail theft and letter carrier assaults (https://abc7ny.com/post/thieves-stealing-postal-keys-open-mailbox/16483252/). Yet, since 2020, they have been prohibited by policy from patrolling high-risk blue collection boxes, safeguarding neighborhood cluster box units, protecting carriers on dangerous routes, or intervening in mail theft as it happens. Instead, PPOs have been relegated to static duty inside postal buildings — while the mail keeps getting stolen.

This is not a question of cost. It is not a legal issue. It is not even a matter of political controversy. It is a policy choice — one that could be reversed today with a single directive. And yet the Inspection Service continues to defend it — without data or evidence, without meaningful review, and without concern for its real-world consequences.

If Congress is serious about restoring public trust in the mail (https://news.usps.com/2022/08/17/public-trust-2/#:~:text=Employees%20must%20protect%20the%20mail,should%20talk%20to%20a%20supervisor.), it must act *now*. That means:

- Mandating the creation of a national mail and package theft fusion center, with participation from USPIS, USPS OIG, the FBI, local law enforcement, and major delivery and financial institutions.
- Restoring full patrol authority to the Postal Police Force under 18 U.S.C. § 3061, allowing officers to return to the streets and protect the postal infrastructure they were hired to defend.
- Requiring real transparency and accountability from USPIS, including separate crime tracking for package theft, publicly available performance metrics, and data-driven resource deployment.

These are not radical demands. They are the minimum standards we should expect from a federal law enforcement agency operating in the 21st century (https://bja.ojp.gov/program/it/national-initiatives/fusion-centers).

If you're surprised that mail theft has become a systemic threat to public order, you are not alone. Most Americans assume that someone is in charge — that when they hand over their mail, they are entrusting it to a system that still functions. But at the moment, that trust is misplaced. And that should concern all of us.

We know what works. Fusion centers. Data-driven deployment. Uniformed police deterrence.

The tools are there. The threat is there.

The only thing missing is the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Frank Albergo is the current national president of the Postal Police Officers Association (PPOA). The PPOA represents uniformed police officers employed by the United States Postal Inspection Service.

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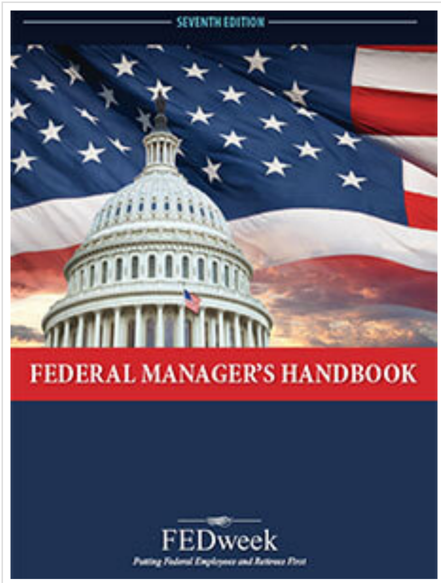

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TSP	G Fund	F Fund	C Fund	S Fund	I Fund
Jul 30	20.0889 ~	20.824 ~	119.7571 ~	114.4461 ~	63.6309 ~
Jul 29	20.0864 ~	20.8114 ~	117.8005 ~	112.8644 ~	61.8421 ~

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TSP	G Fund	F Fund	C Fund	S Fund	I Fund
Jun	0.37 %	0.25 %	-0.95 %	4.34 %	-0.03 %
YTD	2.18 %	0.74 %	10.20 %	18.41 %	16.53 %
1yr	4.40 %	3.83 %	22.31 %	29.16 %	30.05 %
3yr	4.45 %	4.16 %	20.58 %	19.71 %	19.32 %
5yr	3.79 %	0.15 %	13.37 %	6.77 %	10.89 %
10yr	2.89 %	1.63 %	15.47 %	12.63 %	10.76 %

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