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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 9, 2020

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Ms. Le Gretta Ross-Rawlins
United States Postal Service
South New Jersey District
501 Benigno Boulevard
Bellmawr, New Jersey 08099

Dear Ms. Ross-Rawlins,

I am writing on behalf of my constituents, employees of the USPS, who have reached out to me and raised several concerns about a lack of safety protocols to protect them and their loved ones against COVID-19.

Throughout our nation's history, but especially in these difficult times, our postal service workers play a critical role in America's economy and delivery of health care items. As other industries face supply chain interruptions and comply with stay at home orders, postal workers are a reliable presence in neighborhoods and help ensure the delivery of mail, medicines, food items and checks. In times of state stay-at-home orders, our economy is even more reliant on the mail, and thus postal workers are particularly vulnerable to exposure and need full protections.

By way of background, I am unfortunately well aware of health dangers that can arise for USPS employees. In 2001, I worked closely with Bill Lewis, President of the New Jersey State American Postal Workers Union, other postal union presidents, and postal service management in the wake of the anthrax attacks that struck this very same critical distribution center on Route 130.

Five postal employees who worked with the mail disseminated through the Hamilton distribution center in 2001 became gravely ill with both skin and inhalation anthrax. The facility was shut down for more than four years while a \$65 million-decontamination, renovation and massive scouring effort was embarked upon to rid the building and machinery of the airborne anthrax spores.

Regrettably, at first, the postal service, unconvinced that anthrax could be airborne, was neither prepared nor fully responsive to the threat that existed and the medical support that was needed. And while today's COVID-19 emergency is different in its source, one can draw similarities, including the unmitigated need for strict safety protocols to protect workers.

Co-Chairman of the following: Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease • Bi-Partisan Taskforce for Combating Anti-Semitism • Lyme Disease Caucus
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Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases Caucus • Hong Kong Caucus • Congressional Pediatric and Adult Hydrocephalus Caucus

I have been contacted by several postal employees who are very concerned about the apparent lack of protocol in notifying all appropriate staff when another colleague has tested positive for coronavirus. Similarly, employees have raised concerns about the availability of adequate protective equipment and implementation of social distancing policies—where possible.

Last month, after I was contacted by a Trenton USPS employee, who believed he/she had been exposed to the coronavirus at the facility. I contacted the USPS Manager, Cheralyn Morton, who advised that the USPS had informed the proper employees and shared the CDC guidance on ways to reduce the chances of spreading and contracting the virus.

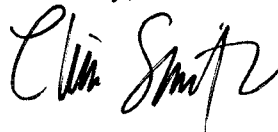
Unfortunately, since that time, I have had heard from several more postal employees throughout my district from the John K. Rafferty facility and additional postal branches, including people who have already tested positive for coronavirus. They are very concerned for their own safety, as well as that of others, expressing a sense of responsibility when their coworkers are not notified of the possible contagion. Additionally, I have received reports of limited access to personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves and cleaning supplies and proper hand sanitizers. In each case, the employees question the steps taken by management to protect them and their families.

To address these matters, I respectfully request a teleconference with you, appropriate members of your team and representatives of employees at postal facilities in my district such as the John K. Rafferty Postal Distribution Center located on Route 130 in Hamilton Township, New Jersey.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. Please respond to me, or my senior caseworker, Jill Morales at Jill.Morales@mail.house.gov or via telephone at (202) 631-6190, to schedule a convenient time.

I look forward to speaking to you soon and I stand ready to work together and forge the best path forward to ensure USPS employees receive the protection they need and deserve.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress

CHS: jm