

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 29, 2011

Chairman Ruth Goldway
Postal Regulatory Commission
901 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20268

Dear Chairman Goldway and members of the Postal Regulatory Commission:

We write to express our strong opposition to the postal regulation published in the July 14, 2011, edition of the *Federal Register* under the heading, "Post Office Organization and Administration: Establishment, Classification, and Discontinuance."

In a letter dated April 18, 2011, following the draft proposal of this regulation, we asked that the Postal Service address a number of concerns about its legality and effect on customer service in Vermont. We are disappointed that these concerns were not addressed in the final version of the regulation.

This regulation will give the U.S. Postal Service expanded authority to consider closing more than 3,600 post offices, mostly in rural areas, including 14 in our State of Vermont.

This regulation may be in direct violation of the law. As you know, 39 U.S. Code §101(a) and (b) clearly states the following: "The Postal Service shall have as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people ... **The Postal Service shall provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns where post offices are not self-sustaining. No small post office shall be closed solely for operating at a deficit, it being the specific intent of the Congress that effective postal services be insured to residents of both urban and rural communities.**"

This regulation is in stark contrast to these statutory obligations as it will allow the Postal Service to study a Post Office for discontinuance due to "insufficient customer demand, evidenced by declining or low volume, revenue, revenue units, local business activity, or local population trends."

Post offices in a rural state such as Vermont are not just post offices — they are often the heart and soul of the town — and they must not be closed down.

Many of these post offices have been in continuous operation for over 100 years and are an essential part of the fabric of Vermont's rural landscape.

We have heard from residents across our state concerned about the loss of their Post Office and the harm it will have on their community. Additionally, many small business owners have contacted our offices to express their serious concerns about the negative economic impact this regulation would have on their businesses if their local post office is closed.

Furthermore, in this regulation, the Postal Service states that "transparency will be enhanced" and the public will receive "expanded opportunity for comment." Our offices have received a number of complaints from residents of communities impacted by previous discontinuance studies because the Postal Service has not been upfront in providing clear information about the process, and that the public meeting is nothing more than a formality, as it appears the Postal Service has already made a final determination to close the post office. The Postal Service should not consider making such drastic changes to a post office without significant public input. Additionally, the methodology being used in discontinuance studies should be clear and readily available to the public.

We know the Postal Service is facing serious budget challenges, but there are common-sense solutions to fixing the Postal Service's financial difficulties that do not have to include closing rural post offices. For example, we fully support rectifying the health benefits pre-fund requirement and restoring the excess funds the Postal Service overpaid into the Civil Service Retirement System. These cost savings are much more substantial than the shuttering of rural post offices.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PETER WELCH
United States Representative