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February 21, 2024

The Honorable Louis DeJoy
Postmaster General
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, D.C. 20260

Dear Postmaster General DeJoy,

I write today regarding the United States Postal Service's (USPS) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) December 15, 2023, report titled *Processing and Delivery of Veterans Affairs Medicine* (23-137-R24). As stated in the report, hundreds of thousands of veterans receive their prescriptions by mail every day and USPS handles a large percentage of these deliveries. Those veterans rely on USPS to get their prescription medications from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in a timely and convenient manner. However, this USPS OIG report highlights several issues with the processing and distribution of VA medication packages that can prevent VA from fulfilling its commitment to our nation's veterans.

As Chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I appreciate the work USPS does to get veterans their medication on time and intact. However, this report suggests USPS must do more to ensure veterans get the medications they need. Depending on the mail class, severely damaged packages are supposed to either be returned to the sender or properly disposed of at a USPS Mail Recovery Center. According the report, three of the six processing facilities visited did not handle damaged medication packages according to this policy. One facility was found to have released loose medication to veterans while another destroyed loose medications in-house instead of following protocol. A third facility not only destroyed medication found in a damaged package, but proceeded to deliver the empty medication package to the veteran. Veterans should not have to wonder if their medication will survive USPS processing, let alone be presented with empty packages while waiting for their much-needed medications.

The OIG report indicates employees at the processing facilities were "unaware" of the policies and procedures for handling damaged pharmacy packages and loose medications while management said there was "no specific training" for such instances. It is unacceptable for the employees tasked with handling VA medication packages to be doing so without proper training or knowledge of USPS policy. In my time on the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I have found that if something is happening at one VA facility it is almost certainly happening at other facilities, and I imagine the same can be said for USPS. Veterans rely on USPS for on-time medication deliveries, so it is imperative that USPS employees around the country are in full compliance with the policies and procedures pertaining to damaged packages and loose medication.

Further, the OIG reported inconsistent and inaccurate scanning of packages and mail at the USPS facilities assessed. USPS Priority Mail Open and Distribute (PMOD) scans are designed to increase transparency in the shipping process and allow customers to accurately track their packages and mail. VA Pharmacy management stated USPS did not always perform the required PMOD scans and other packages received improper duplicate “delivered” scans. The OIG found postal workers were unaware of the scanning policies, management did not enforce the policies, and there was no control to prevent improper duplicate “delivered” scans. These easily avoidable mistakes have the potential to delay veterans’ prescription deliveries and add confusion to the process.

Rural Montanans rely on USPS to pay their bills, run their small businesses, and receive their prescription medications. For many veterans living in rural Montana, USPS is the only way to receive their VA medications, especially when the nearest VA pharmacy might be several hundred miles away. USPS must ensure that veterans in Montana and across the country can trust that their prescription medications will make it to their door on time and unimpeded by processing errors.

The OIG offered three recommendations in this report: developing and implementing specific training for handling damaged pharmacy packages and loose medication, additional training for a review process of PMOD scanning, and introducing a new control to prevent duplicate “delivered” scans. Please provide an update on the development and implementation of these recommendations.

I look forward to your response and thank you for your continued support of veterans.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester