

## **New USPS standard changes creates unreliable delivery in smaller communities**

When 57-year-old Gainesville resident Candy Cosner ran out of her medication despite ordering it a week in advance, her frustration wasn't new, it was just the most recent incident she's had with the United States Postal Service.

"I've been out of my meds for three days," she said.

Cosner relies on a mail service for nearly everything since she doesn't have a car. She said she gets everything mailed to her house from medication to bills to groceries.

However, she said her medication was mailed a week ago and she just got it on the following Wednesday.

While comparing delivery times with last year, she said, she received a letter from her friend in Jacksonville four days after it was sent – this year, the same letter from Jacksonville took seven days to reach her in Gainesville.

Although she resides in a city, she still faces the downgrades of this new service when mail is delivered to bigger metropolitan hubs like Jacksonville.

She said she's had missing and damaged packages as well as slow-delivery issues with USPS.

Based on her experience, she said she no longer trusts USPS and is thinking of switching to other mail services where she can.

However, she said her medication must go through USPS. "Unfortunately, I'm stuck with that."

USPS used to be the most convenient mail service for her. She said she lives right near the post office, making it her top choice, but with these new shortcomings, she's looking to FedEx and UPS.

“I’ve gotten things delivered to me through FedEx or through UPS and it tends to come when its supposed to come,” she said.

To add to her dissatisfaction, she said she feels USPS just isn’t worth it anymore.

“The post office is getting extremely expensive,” she said.

The cost coupled with increased unreliability, she said, makes her distrust the postal service.

Her frustration is increased by unhelpful customer service from USPS. She said she doesn’t even try to go through customer service.

“They can't personally make things go faster,” she said.

Cosner isn’t alone.

Another Alachua County resident, William Smith, a 24-year-old assistant manager of Zaxby’s, said he is dissatisfied with USPS and their customer service as well.

“It’s not too friendly and not too helpful,” he said.

He said having a reliable mail service available to him is important since he uses it to pay bills like rent.

He said he had trouble recalling a money order he had accidentally written the wrong address on for his rent.

“It didn't get back to my apartment after another month, and then once I sent it out again with the correct address, it took, like, four months for me to be able to get the refund,” he said.

Like Cosner, Smith also prefers other mail services like UPS when it comes to reliability.

“If I have another option, I most likely will go with the other option, just due to the experiences I've had and the inconvenience it's been,” he said.

Both Cosner and Smith share complaints saying mail delivery has slowed significantly in the past year, affecting prescription deliveries to rent payments.

But why have there been so many problems with USPS delivery reliability?

This is the cost of USPS' changes to delivery standards as a part of their 10-year "Delivering for America" plan.

This project outlines the modernization of equipment, moving to electric trucks, and switching to more surface routes to lower costs and improve reliability.

It also is meant to cut costs for the postal service – around \$36 billion over the next decade, after losing \$9.5 billion last year, according to their Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report to Congress.

The new standards will affect First-Class Mail, Periodicals, Marketing Mail, Package Services, USPS Ground Advantage, Priority Mail, and Priority Mail Express, according to a USPS Fact Sheet.

USPS is centralizing its operations meaning mail will be sent to larger, but fewer, regional hubs rather than multiple local facilities in order to be sorted.

From there the mail will be sent out to the local delivery centers for final delivery.

According to the Postal Regulatory Commission, this will disproportionately affect rural areas that will have to wait longer for delivery service as mail gets sent to larger hubs for sorting before reaching their local and final delivery step.

The Postal Regulatory Commission also says that half of ZIP Code pairs will experience "downgraded service" for Single-Piece First-Class Mail like letters or utility bills.

The commission states that this downgraded service has already been reported in Richmond, Virginia and Atlanta, Georgia.

To add, the committee highlights that even if the total projected savings are fulfilled by USPS, it would only be around 4% of their operating expenses for the 2024 Fiscal Year, which was \$81.8 billion.

USPS says sorting and delivering mail through larger, regional facilities will stabilize reliability and delivery times as well as modernize the mail system, however, watchdogs like the Postal Regulatory Committee warn of the declining service this plan can bring and urges the Postal Service to reconsider if their gain – cutting costs – outweigh the costs – unequal and unreliable delivery.