

March 11, 2003

Submission to the President's Commission on the United States Postal Service

Founded in 1992, Citizen Outreach is a non-profit, non-partisan organization which promotes greater citizen understanding of and participation in public policy issues at the federal, state and local levels based on the principles of limited government, free markets, strong national defense and individual liberty.

We take issue with regard to a point made by William Young, President of the National Letter Carriers Association, during the hearing on February 18th that the Postal Service's statutory monopoly over access to the mailbox should be retained.

As exists today by law, it is a federal offense for anyone to leave letters, flyers or brochures in the mailboxes of homeowners if they do not have postage. In light of the ever-increasing costs affiliated with using the Postal Service as the exclusive delivery vehicle for stamped mail, we believe reform efforts should consider recommending an end to the additional monopoly granted the Postal Service on home mailbox access.

While large, well-funded businesses and organizations can and will be able to continue using the services of the post office for letter delivery at today's rates, many small, local neighborhood businesses aren't so fortunate. Indeed, it's not so much the cost of printing which makes such mass communications in resident neighborhoods problematic for many small and start-up businesses, but the cost of postage.

Many an entrepreneur is ready, willing and able to hand-carry printed flyers, brochures and other letters to neighborhood residents offering their services or otherwise promoting their businesses on their own, thus saving the cost of using the Postal Service to provide for such distribution. However, due to existing law which forbids such individuals from placing their material in the homeowner's mailbox, such individuals are left with no choice but to leave behind printed materials inside doorways, attached to gates and fences, or on automobile windshields.

As such practices don't afford for secure, enclosed delivery, such materials are often overlooked, damaged by inclement weather or blown away causing litter in neighborhoods which is neither desired nor necessary. There is also the inherent and unnecessary fear many homeowners, especially the elderly, experience when a stranger approaches their door and opens it in order to leave literature.

Such problems and concerns are not limited to small businesses. Small, under-funded community organizations - such as PTAs, Girl Scouts, Kiwanis Clubs, etc. - are also adversely affected by the law which prohibits their volunteers from distributing literature advising of community meetings, activities and events using the homeowner's mailbox.

In addition, many under-funded political campaigns for offices ranging from school board to Congress are adversely affected by their inability to use the homeowner's mailbox for delivery of campaign-related, free speech communications.

As it is the homeowner's mailbox provided for by the homeowner himself or herself at their own expense for the convenience of the Postal Service for home delivery purposes, it is difficult to understand why the Postal Service should be allowed to maintain its monopoly access control of what material is deposited into these receptacles.

While it is understandable and desired to maintain criminal penalties for REMOVING materials from a homeowner's mailbox, it makes no sense to criminalize small business owners, community volunteers and political candidates for putting printed materials INTO those mailboxes.

The home mailbox is not paid for by the Postal Service, it is the private property of its owner. That owner should be given the right to give permission to someone other than the Postal Service to leave something in it. The issues of security and the sanctity of the mail are no different whether it is a person's front porch, mailbox, or living room.

Greater access to the mailbox would promote free speech rights, increase the quality of service from the USPS by injecting some competition (they would still have their delivery monopoly, which is another issue), and not alter the financial viability of the Postal Service. Individuals and local authorities are amply adequate to protect the mailbox.

In closing, we would like to point out that according to the survey of developed countries found in the Postal Transformation Plan, Appendix H-3, the United States is the only country which provides its postal service with monopoly access to homeowner mailboxes. Clearly it is not an essential element of a postal system if it is absent in other countries. It's one thing to afford the Postal Service a monopoly on letter delivery; it's quite another to also afford it a monopoly on mailbox access, as well. We urge the Commission to give due consideration to this matter in its reform considerations.

Contact Information:

Chuck Muth

President

Citizen Outreach

611 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, #439

Washington, DC 20003-4303