



May 2024

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Inspection Service Should Document Its Law Enforcement Workforce Decision- Making Processes

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

View [GAO-24-106497](#). For more information, contact David Marroni at (202) 512-2834 or marronid@gao.gov or Derrick Collins at (202) 512-8777 or collinsd@gao.gov.

Highlights of [GAO-24-106497](#), a report to congressional requesters

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U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Inspection Service Should Document Its Law Enforcement Workforce Decision-Making Processes

Why GAO Did This Study

In recent years, letter carriers have been robbed, including at gunpoint, threatening their safety and the security of the mail they carry.

GAO was asked to review issues related to postal crime and law enforcement. This report addresses: (1) recent trends in cases of serious crime against USPS employees and property, (2) the responsibilities of postal inspectors and postal police in responding to serious crime, and (3) the extent to which the Inspection Service has processes for determining the size and location of its postal inspector and postal police workforce.

GAO analyzed data from the Inspection Service on serious crime cases from fiscal years 2017 through 2023, the most recent data. GAO determined the data were reliable for the purposes of this report. GAO also reviewed federal laws, workforce policies and procedures, and interviewed Inspection Service officials. GAO assessed the Inspection Service's workforce processes against internal control principles related to decision-making.

What GAO Recommends

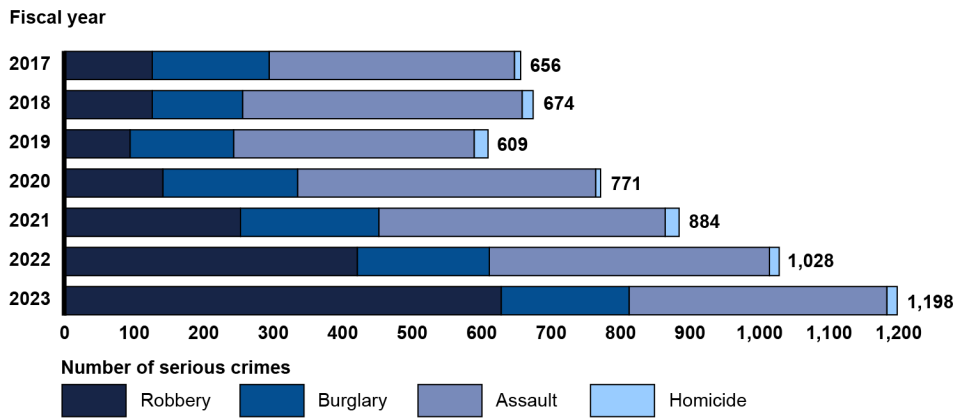
GAO is making three recommendations to USPS: (1) document processes for determining the size and location of the postal inspector workforce, (2) fully document processes for determining the size and location of the postal police workforce, and (3) set a time frame for completing a security force assessment for the postal police workforce. The Inspection Service agreed with all three recommendations and plans to take action to implement them.

What GAO Found

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service (Inspection Service) is the law enforcement arm of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). The Inspection Service is charged with, among other things, protecting USPS employees and property against serious crime—which include robbery, burglary, assault, and homicide. According to GAO's review of Inspection Service data, cases of serious crime have increased almost every year from fiscal years 2017 through 2023. This is largely due to an increase in robbery cases, which

increased nearly sevenfold from fiscal years 2019 through 2023 (see figure). GAO’s review found that these robberies have generally targeted letter carriers, increasingly involved firearms, and targeted the universal keys which USPS employees use to access mailboxes.

U.S. Postal Inspection Service Serious Crime Cases, Fiscal Years 2017 - 2023



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

Accessible Data for U.S. Postal Inspection Service Serious Crime Cases, Fiscal Years 2017 – 2023

Fiscal year	Robbery	Burglary	Assault	Homicide
2017	126	168	353	9
2018	126	130	402	16
2019	94	149	346	20
2020	141	194	429	7
2021	253	199	412	20
2022	421	190	403	14
2023	628	184	371	15

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

Postal inspectors and postal police are responsible for responding to serious crime. Specifically, in fiscal year 2023, more than 1,200 postal inspectors were responsible for investigating these crimes, among other responsibilities. About 370 postal police provided facility and perimeter security at 33 USPS properties—generally mail processing and distribution centers.

GAO found that the Inspection Service has not fully documented its processes for determining the size and location of its postal inspector and postal police workforce. For postal inspectors, Inspection Service officials described processes including regular reviews by division officials, but the

processes were not documented. GAO also found that the Inspection Service partially documented such processes for its postal police workforce. Documenting workforce decision-making processes could help the Inspection Service ensure it allocates law enforcement resources according to mission needs. Further, the Inspection Service has not assessed the size and location of its postal police workforce since 2011. Officials said they are planning to conduct a new security force assessment, but they could not provide GAO the time frames for doing so. As such, it is unclear how long the Inspection Service will rely on outdated information to determine how to align its postal police workforce with current security needs.

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Abbreviations

Inspection Service	U.S. Postal Inspection Service
postal police	postal police officers
PPOA	Postal Police Officers Association
USPS	U.S. Postal Service

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May 29, 2024

Congressional Requesters

In recent years, U.S. Postal Service (USPS) letter carriers in Washington, D.C.; Chicago, IL; Portland, OR; and other places across the U.S. have been robbed at gunpoint, putting their safety and the security of the mail they carried at risk. Further, some USPS facilities and collection boxes across the country have been broken into in recent years. In many instances, these break-ins and robberies resulted in mail theft. A wide range of items can be stolen from the mail, including personal checks, which criminals can alter, then cash or sell using online criminal marketplaces.

Within USPS, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (Inspection Service) is responsible for supporting and protecting USPS's employees, customers, and infrastructure, as well as enforcing the laws affecting the nation's mail system, among other tasks. For example, the Inspection Service helps prevent crimes against USPS employees and property—including burglary, robbery, assault, and homicide—and investigates such crimes.¹ The Inspection Service performs its work by relying upon its law enforcement personnel, specifically postal inspectors and postal police officers (postal police), deployed in various locations across the country.

The recent and widespread nature of robberies, burglaries, and other serious crime committed against USPS employees and property has raised questions from lawmakers and USPS employee groups about actions USPS is taking to protect its employees and property.² You asked

¹For the purposes of this report, we refer to burglaries, robberies, assaults, and homicides as “serious crime against USPS employees and property” or “serious crime.” According to the Inspection Service, burglary is the forcible entry into a building or structure with the intent to commit a crime. Robbery is the taking of personal property from the victim's person or immediate presence through force or threat of force. Assault is the unlawful use of force, physical violence, or constraint inflicted upon another person. Homicide is the unlawful killing of one human being by another. Other types of postal crime, such as mail fraud, mail theft, and mailing prohibited items were not within the scope of our study.

²U.S. Postal Service, “USPS, Postal Inspection Service Roll Out Expanded Crime Prevention Measures to Crack Down on Mail Theft, Enhance Employee Safety and Strengthen Consumer Protections” (May 12, 2023), accessed May 18, 2023, <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/national-releases/2023/0512-usps-postal-inspection-service-roll-out-expanded-measures-to-crack-down-on-mail-theft.htm>.

us to review issues related to postal crime and the Inspection Service's use of postal inspectors and postal police. This report addresses:

1. recent trends in cases of serious crime against USPS employees and property,
2. the responsibilities of postal inspectors and postal police in responding to serious crime, and
3. the extent to which the Inspection Service has processes for determining the size and location of its postal inspector and postal police workforce.

To describe the recent trends in serious crime against USPS employees and property, we analyzed nationwide data from the Inspection Service's Case Management System. Postal inspectors use this system to enter and track reported crimes against USPS employees and property. The data included cases of robberies, burglaries, assaults, and homicides opened by postal inspectors from fiscal years 2017 through 2023. We chose 2017 because it captured case data before the Inspection Service issued a 2020 memo on postal police work occurring off USPS property. This memo was based on a 2017 USPS analysis on postal police statutory authority and responsibilities. We also chose fiscal year 2023 as it was the most recent year of available data.

To assess the reliability of these data, we reviewed Inspection Service documentation, conducted electronic and manual testing of the data, and interviewed Inspection Service officials responsible for maintaining the data. We determined that these data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of describing trends in the numbers and types of cases opened by postal inspectors and for describing general trends in serious crime committed against USPS employees and property.

To describe the responsibilities postal inspectors and postal police have in responding to serious crime, we analyzed Inspection Service policies, procedures, and guidance, such as policy manuals and handbooks, that outline postal inspector and postal police responsibilities. We also reviewed relevant federal laws, court cases, and Inspection Service responses to civil litigation and labor grievances.

To assess the extent to which the Inspection Service has processes for determining the size and location of its postal inspector and postal police workforce, we first reviewed the Inspection Service's workforce processes and procedures. We then compared these to internal control standards

that we identified as relevant to assessing USPS's workforce decision-making activities. Specifically, we focused on internal control standards related to documenting decision-making processes and using current information for management decision-making.³ We also compared the Inspection Service's activities against factors outlined in the Inspection Service Manual for when a security force assessment should be conducted.⁴

For all three objectives, we interviewed a range of relevant stakeholders. Specifically, we interviewed Inspection Service leadership, including the Chief Postal Inspector and Chief Counsel, and others located in the national headquarters (Washington, D.C.). We also interviewed senior officials, including division inspectors-in-charge and postal police managers, at five of the Inspection Service's 16 divisions.⁵ We selected a nongeneralizable sample of divisions to ensure variation in geographic location, the number of postal inspectors and postal police, and the number of serious crime cases opened by postal inspectors in the Case Management System from fiscal years 2017 through 2022.⁶ We also interviewed representatives of postal employee organizations and the union that represents postal police officers.⁷ Additional information about our scope and methodology is described in appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2023 to May 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our

³Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission, *Internal Control-Integrated Framework* (2013). This framework is a set of practices that we identified as reasonable and relevant internal control criteria standards to use in evaluating USPS's activities and is the internal control framework USPS uses. It is also recognized as a leading framework for designing, implementing, and conducting internal controls and assessing the effectiveness of internal controls. GAO adapted these internal control principles for use in the federal government. For more information see GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 14, 2014).

⁴U.S. Postal Inspection Service, *United States Postal Inspection Service Manual*, (Washington, D.C.: July 2023).

⁵We interviewed Inspection Service officials (inspectors-in-charge and postal police managers) in the Denver; Houston; New York; San Francisco; and Washington, D.C. divisions.

⁶Fiscal year 2023 data were not available when we made our selection.

⁷Postal inspectors are not unionized.

findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

USPS Mission and Operations

USPS plays a critical role in the nation's communications and commerce. USPS's mission is to provide prompt, reliable, and efficient universal postal service. This means USPS is required to serve, as nearly as practicable, the entire population of the U.S.⁸ To provide universal postal service, USPS maintains the largest physical and logistical infrastructure of any non-military government institution. We have included USPS's financial viability on our High-Risk List since 2009 because USPS has not been able to fully fund its current level of services and financial obligations.⁹ In March 2021, USPS released a 10-year strategic plan outlining key goals, including financial viability.¹⁰

In fiscal year 2023, USPS serviced a total mail and package volume of over 116 billion items to more than 166 million delivery points, along more than 234,000 delivery routes. To provide its service, USPS has developed a vast mail collection, processing, transportation, and delivery network. Its portfolio of properties includes over 33,000 post offices, as well as processing and distribution centers that support mail delivery, among other facilities.

USPS is one of the largest civilian employers in the U.S., employing over 640,000 employees in fiscal year 2023. Among these employees:

- 52 percent of the USPS workforce are letter carriers. These employees primarily work off USPS property as they deliver mail.

⁸39 U.S.C. § 403(a).

⁹GAO, *High-Risk Series: Efforts Made to Achieve Progress Need to be Maintained and Expanded to Fully Address All Areas*, [GAO-23-106203](#) (Washington, D.C., Apr. 20, 2023).

¹⁰U.S. Postal Service, *Delivering for America: Our Vision and Ten-Year Plan to Achieve Financial Sustainability and Service Excellence* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2021).

More specifically, this letter carrier figure includes about 208,000 city carriers as well as about 127,000 rural carriers.¹¹

- The remaining 48 percent of employees cover a range of occupations, including many that work at USPS facilities. These employees include 127,000 clerks, about 45,000 mail handlers, and about 40,000 postmasters and supervisors.

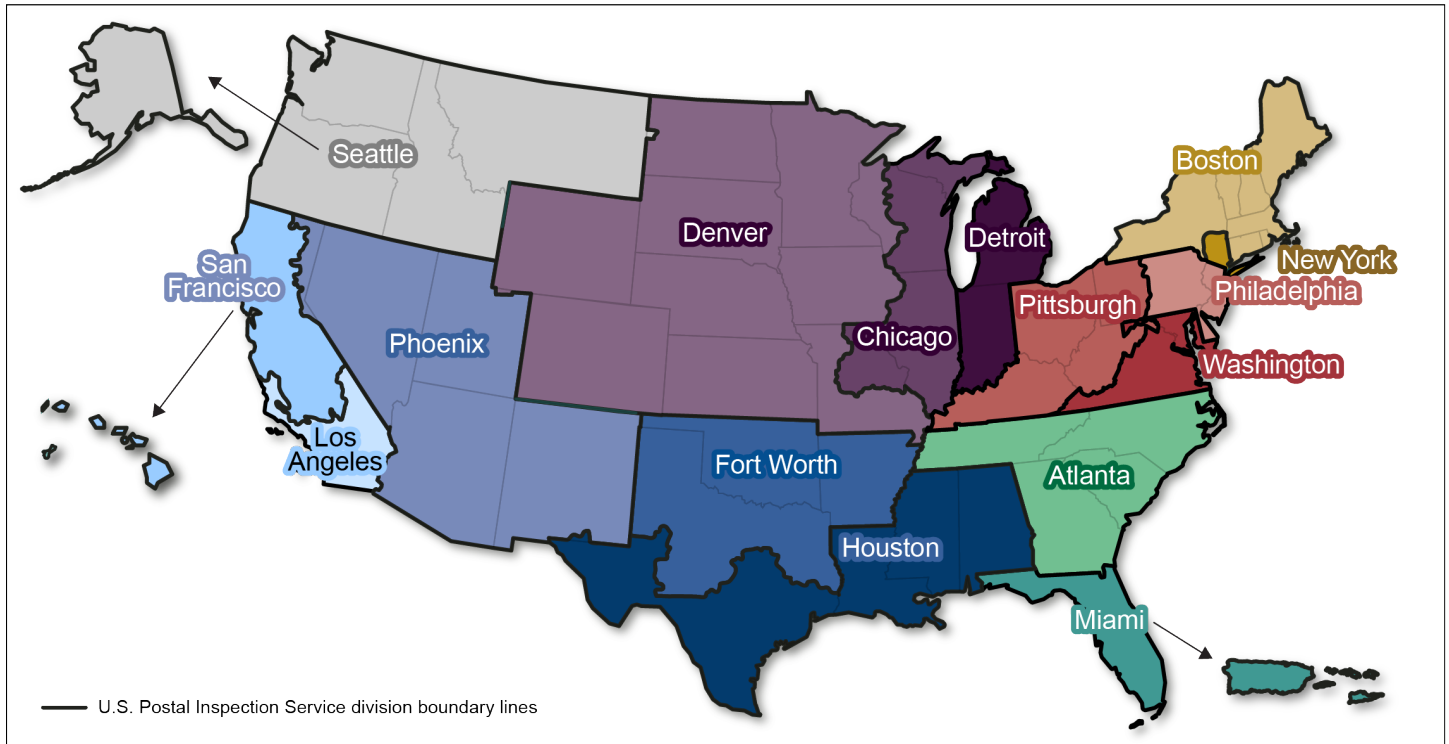
Inspection Service

The Inspection Service is the law enforcement arm within USPS. It is tasked with enforcing the laws that defend the nation's mail system from illegal or dangerous use and ensuring public trust in the mail. The Inspection Service investigates mail theft, robberies and burglaries of postal facilities, and assaults and threats on postal employees, among other areas.

The Inspection Service is led by the Chief Postal Inspector, who is supported by a leadership team. In addition, inspectors-in-charge are assigned across 16 divisions, which collectively cover all U.S. states and territories. (See fig. 1.) Inspectors-in-charge manage operations, including workforce decisions, in their respective divisions.

¹¹The number of city carriers includes city carrier assistants, and the number of rural carriers includes rural carrier associates.

Figure 1: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Divisions



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service information and Map Resources. | GAO-24-106497

In addition to its leadership positions, in fiscal year 2023 the Inspection Service employed approximately 2,300 employees, including law enforcement personnel, analysts, and administrative personnel. USPS and Inspection Service officials told us the Inspection Service’s overall budget and total authorized staffing levels are set by USPS. Law enforcement personnel—comprising postal inspectors and postal police—makes up 70 percent of the Inspection Service’s workforce. As of September 22, 2023, Inspection Service officials said they employed 1,228 postal inspectors—14 percent fewer than the authorized level of 1,431—and 367 postal police—37 percent fewer than the authorized level of 581. In addition to postal inspectors and postal police, the Inspection Service oversees the deployment of contract guards. These guards provide building security services—such as monitoring building entrances and exits—at some USPS properties.

Cases of Serious Crime against USPS Employees and Property Have Increased in Recent Years, Driven by a Rise in Robbery Cases

The number of cases opened by postal inspectors involving serious crime against USPS employees and property has generally increased from fiscal years 2017 through 2023, according to the Inspection Service's nationwide case data.¹² Inspection Service case data showed a decrease in the number of cases of serious crime from fiscal year 2018 to 2019 but then there was a steady increase in cases starting in fiscal year 2019. In fiscal year 2019, inspectors opened about 600 cases compared to about 1,200 in fiscal year 2023. The most common type of serious crime cases opened by inspectors in fiscal year 2023 were robbery cases with about 600 reported cases. In comparison, inspectors opened about 400 assault cases and 200 burglary cases during the same year. Additionally, according to the Inspection Service, inspectors opened two homicide cases in response to the deaths of on duty USPS employees in fiscal year 2023.¹³

¹²Overall serious crime cases increased slightly from fiscal year 2017 to 2018 and then declined slightly from fiscal year 2018 to 2019. See figure 2. The Case Management System—which contains the Inspection Service's nationwide case data—might not capture crimes if they are not reported to the Inspection Service. Inspection Service division office officials that we interviewed told us that they believe that almost all, if not all, serious crime is reported and therefore reflected in the data.

¹³In fiscal year 2023, according to the Inspection Service, inspectors opened 15 total homicide cases in response to the deaths of employees, of which 13 took place while the employee was off duty according to Inspection Service officials. The Inspection Service opens a case for all homicides of USPS employees, regardless of location, including those homicides that occur while the employee is off duty. For all such cases, inspectors take steps including documenting local law enforcement reports, interviewing the deceased employee's co-workers and supervisor, and documenting any workplace issues that may be relevant to the employee's death.

Definition of Serious Crime

Our review focuses on cases of serious crime entered and tracked by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in its Case Management System. We define serious crime as follows:

Robbery: the taking of personal property from the victim's person or immediate presence through force or threat of force.

Burglary: the forcible entry into a building or structure with the intent to commit a crime.

Assault: the unlawful use of force, physical violence, or constraint inflicted upon another person.

Homicide: the unlawful killing of one human being by another.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service information. | GAO-24-106497

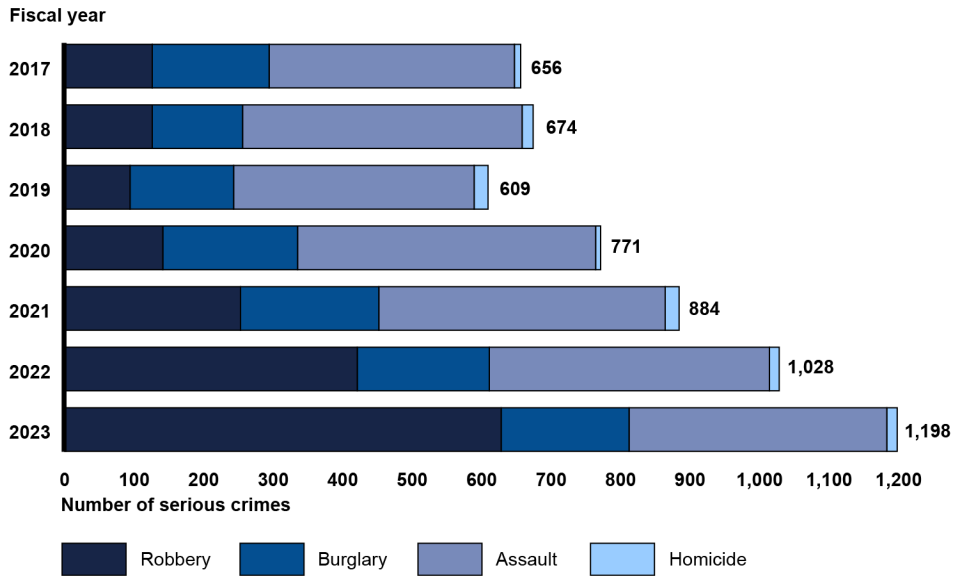
Further, serious crime against USPS employees and property occurred in various locations across the U.S. Specifically, postal inspectors opened serious crime cases in almost 500 different metropolitan areas.¹⁴ Despite the overall increase in cases of serious crime, some Inspection Service officials told us that local trends varied. Inspection Service officials at three divisions told us that trends in serious crime against USPS employees and property in their division generally mirrored local crime trends. In comparison, an Inspection Service official at another division stated that there was not a clear relationship between the local crime trends and serious crime against USPS employees and property within their division.¹⁵

Our analysis of the Inspection Service's case data found that robbery cases increased nearly sevenfold from fiscal years 2019 through 2023. The number of cases of assaults, burglaries, and homicides fluctuated over this time period but did not change to the same extent as robberies. As a result, the increase in robbery cases since fiscal year 2019 is the primary driver for the overall increase in serious crime cases (see fig. 2). We describe some efforts later in the report that the Inspection Service has undertaken to help address the increase in robberies.

¹⁴Metropolitan areas consist of the county or counties (or equivalent entities) associated with at least one urban area with a population of at least 50,000, plus adjacent counties having a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured through commuting ties. These areas are delineated by the Office of Management and Budget for use by federal statistical agencies.

¹⁵Officials at the fifth division we spoke with did not provide a view on this topic.

Figure 2: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Serious Crime Cases, Fiscal Years 2017–2023



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

Accessible Data for Figure 2: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Serious Crime Cases, Fiscal Years 2017–2023

Fiscal year	Robbery	Burglary	Assault	Homicide
2017	126	168	353	9
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2021	253	199	412	20
2022	421	190	403	14
2023	628	184	371	15

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

Note: The U.S. Postal Inspection Service opens a case for all homicides of U.S. Postal Service (USPS) employees, regardless of location, including those that occur while the employee is off duty. Not all the homicide cases included in this figure occurred while the USPS employee was on duty.

Our analysis of the Inspection Service’s case data found that the number of serious crime cases occurring off USPS property increased

significantly compared to on-property crime.¹⁶ Specifically, for fiscal years 2017 through 2021, about 35 percent of serious crime cases occurred off USPS property. However, the proportion of serious crime cases occurring off USPS property increased to about 52 percent in fiscal year 2022 and 60 percent in fiscal year 2023.

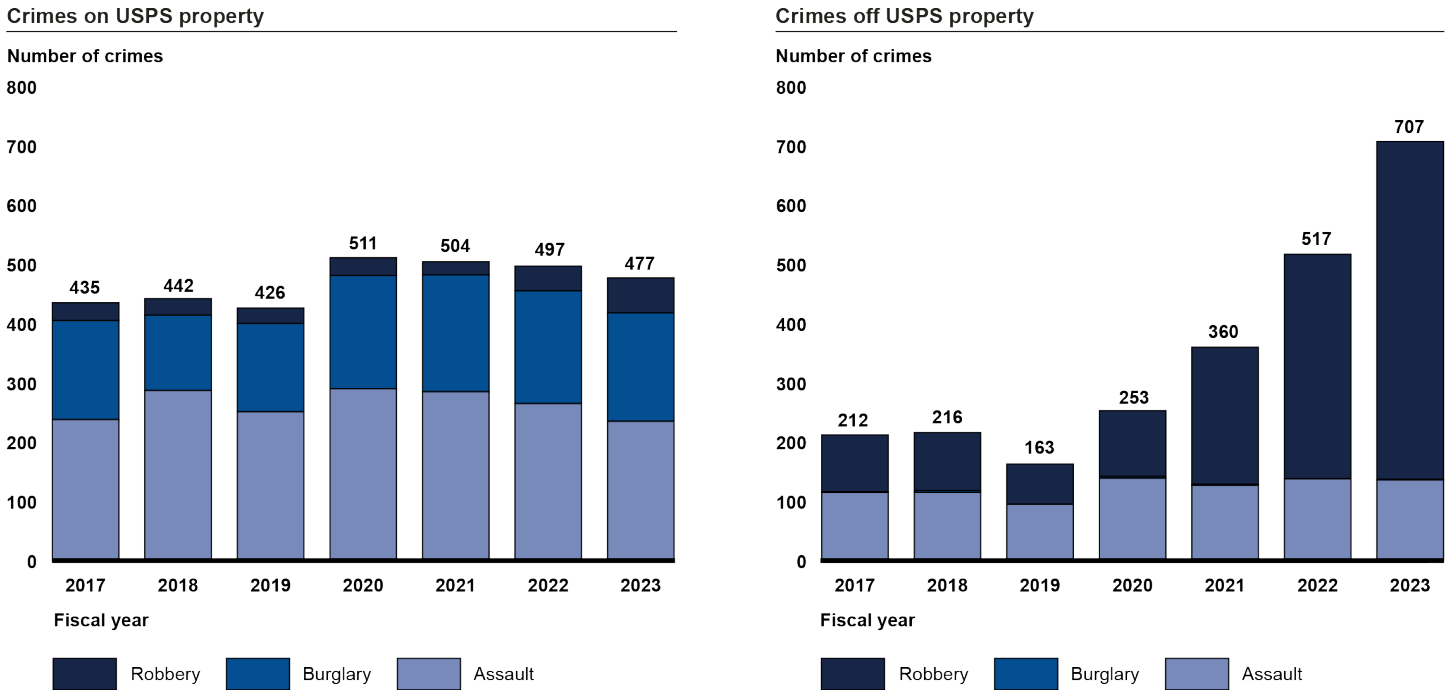
The shift of serious crime from on USPS property to off USPS property is primarily due to the increase in robbery cases discussed above, which have generally targeted letter carriers, whose mail delivery duties occur mostly off USPS property. For example, in fiscal year 2023, about 90 percent of robbery cases were of city letter carriers and about another 5 percent of robbery cases were of rural letter carriers.¹⁷ In contrast, about 2 percent of robbery cases occurred at postal facilities or postal retail stores.¹⁸ Inspection Service officials, as well as representatives of USPS employee organizations, told us that it is difficult for the Inspection Service to protect letter carriers who deliver mail across a wide geographic area because of limited staff resources. See figure 3 for the numbers of serious crime cases that occurred on and off USPS property.

¹⁶Generally, USPS property is defined as all real property under the charge and control of USPS with the exception of any portions of real property that are leased or subleased to private tenants for their exclusive use or sidewalks along the street frontage of USPS property falling within the property lines that are not physically distinguishable from adjacent municipal or other public sidewalks. 39 C.F.R. § 232.1.

¹⁷USPS generally classifies routes as either city or rural, among other categories, and USPS letter carriers are generally either a city letter carrier or a rural letter carrier. Their jobs align to the specific USPS delivery route, with city letter carriers likely to service routes in urban and suburban areas, and rural letter carriers servicing rural areas. USPS uses the U.S. Census Bureau's definitions to determine whether an address is in a rural or urban area.

¹⁸The remaining 3 percent of robberies targeted drivers who transport mail between USPS facilities, USPS employees belonging to smaller categories such as supervisors, and USPS employees whose employee type was not recorded in the case file.

Figure 3: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Serious Crime Cases Occurring On and Off U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Property, Fiscal Years 2017–2023



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

Accessible Data for Figure 3: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Serious Crime Cases Occurring On and Off U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Property, Fiscal Years 2017–2023

na	Crimes on USPS Property			Crimes off USPS Property		
	Assault	Burglary	Robbery	Assault	Burglary	Robbery
Fiscal Year	Assault	Burglary	Robbery	Assault	Burglary	Robbery
2017	238	167	30	115	1	96
2018	287	127	28	115	3	98
2019	251	149	26	95	0	68
2020	290	191	30	139	3	111
2021	285	197	22	127	2	231
2022	265	190	42	138	0	379
2023	235	183	59	136	1	570

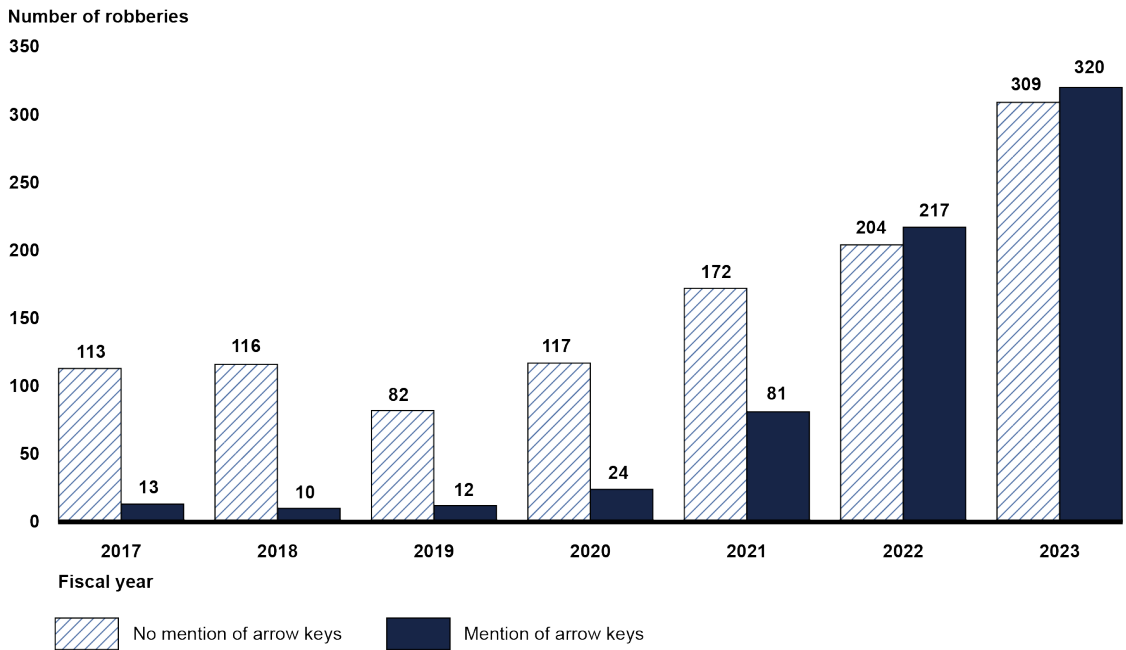
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

Note: We did not include homicides in this analysis because of the small number of homicide cases opened during the period of our review in comparison to other serious crime cases and because not all homicide cases occurred while employees were on duty. Burglary cases predominately occurred on USPS property, with a total of 10 burglary cases reported off USPS property from fiscal years 2017 through 2023.

Our analysis of Inspection Service case data indicates that robbery cases have increasingly targeted the universal keys USPS employees use to access mailboxes, which USPS calls arrow keys, and involved firearms.¹⁹

- **Arrow keys.** Our analysis of the narrative descriptions of robbery cases in Inspection Service data found that a specific mention of arrow keys in the data increased from about 10 percent of cases in fiscal year 2017 to about 51 percent in fiscal year 2023.²⁰ These mentions included cases where the victim reported that the assailant took arrow keys as well as cases where the victim reported that the assailant specifically demanded the arrow key, whether it was ultimately taken or not. See figure 4 for more information.

Figure 4: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Robbery Cases with Mention of Arrow Keys in Investigative Case Narratives, Fiscal Years 2017–2023



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

¹⁹USPS uses arrow keys to access a range of mailboxes, such as street collection boxes and apartment house mailboxes.

²⁰Cases in the Inspection Service’s Case Management System generally include a narrative description of the case and investigative steps, which, in the case of robberies, may include items demanded by a perpetrator or reported as taken. Not all cases have narratives and some narratives do not contain details about items taken.

Accessible Data for Figure 4: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Robbery Cases with Mention of Arrow Keys in Investigative Case Narratives, Fiscal Years 2017–2023

Fiscal year	No mention of arrow keys	Mention of arrow keys
2017	113	13
2018	116	10
2019	82	12
2020	117	24
2021	172	81
2022	204	217
2023	309	320

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service data. | GAO-24-106497

Note: Arrow keys are universal keys U.S. Postal Service employees use to access a range of mailboxes, such as street collection boxes and apartment house mailboxes.

Inspection Service officials, representatives of USPS employee groups, and local law enforcement officials told us that perpetrators target arrow keys because they allow them to steal mail from multiple mailboxes. Inspection Service officials also noted that USPS has pilot programs underway exploring options to replace or improve the security of arrow keys.²¹

- **Firearms.** Our analysis of the Inspection Service’s case data found that robbery cases also reflected a general increase in the presence of a firearm during the period of our review. Specifically, our analysis of the data indicated firearms were present in about 41-55 percent of robbery cases in fiscal years 2017 through 2021.²² Further, our analysis of the data indicated firearms were present in about 68 percent of robbery cases in fiscal year 2022 and 66 percent in fiscal year 2023. According to Inspection Service data for fiscal years 2017 through 2023, about 95 percent of robbery cases of USPS employees where a firearm was present did not result in a physical injury to the

²¹In September 2023, the USPS Office of Inspector General recommended that USPS develop a plan to include proposed quantities, projected cost, and actionable milestones to fully deploy the eArrow lock—a new electronic locking system—and high security mailbox initiatives and include measures to assess their effectiveness. U.S. Postal Service, Office of Inspector General, *U.S. Postal Service’s Response to Mail Theft*, 22-178-R23 (Arlington, VA: Sept. 28, 2023).

²²Fiscal year 2020 marked the lowest point in the rate of firearm presence in the period of our review with about 41 percent of robbery cases indicating a firearm was present. While the percentage of robbery cases in which a firearm was present declined from about 52 percent in fiscal year 2019 to about 41 percent in fiscal year 2020, the total number of robbery cases in which a firearm was present increased from 49 cases in fiscal year 2019 to 58 cases in fiscal year 2020.

victim. However, local law enforcement officials and USPS employee organizations emphasized to us that, even in cases where there is no physical injury, such incidents can have a negative effect on individual victims and the USPS workforce. For example, representatives of a postal employee union described their membership as frustrated with the fact that carriers have been threatened, which can result in trauma and stress.

Postal Inspectors Are Responsible for Investigating Serious Crime, Postal Police for Providing Facility Security and Responding to Some Serious Crime

Postal Inspectors Are Responsible for Leading Investigations and Taking Other Actions in Response to Serious Crime

Postal inspectors investigate criminal matters related to USPS and the mail.²³ Postal inspectors' investigative duties are outlined in a policy manual called the Inspection Service Manual.²⁴ According to Inspection Service officials, this manual provides guidance for all postal inspector responsibilities and is the primary policy manual used by postal inspectors. Examples of postal inspectors' investigative duties outlined in the manual include coordinating to gather information from first responders; interviewing victims, witnesses, and others involved at the scene of the alleged crime; and gathering additional evidence. Further, inspectors are responsible for detaining and arresting individuals suspected of committing crimes against USPS employees or property and coordinating with prosecutors and other law enforcement agencies

²³Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3061(a)-(b), postal inspectors and other agents of USPS designated by the Board of Governors investigate criminal matters related to USPS and the mails. Postal inspectors may serve warrants and subpoenas issued under the authority of the United States and make arrests without warrant for offenses against the United States committed in their presence or if they have reasonable grounds to believe that the person to be arrested has committed or is committing such a felony, among other things. Generally, these powers may only be exercised in the enforcement of laws regarding property in the custody of USPS, property of USPS, the use of the mails, and other postal offenses and to the extent authorized by the Attorney General.

²⁴U.S. Postal Inspection Service, *United States Postal Inspection Service Manual* (Washington, D.C.: July 2023).

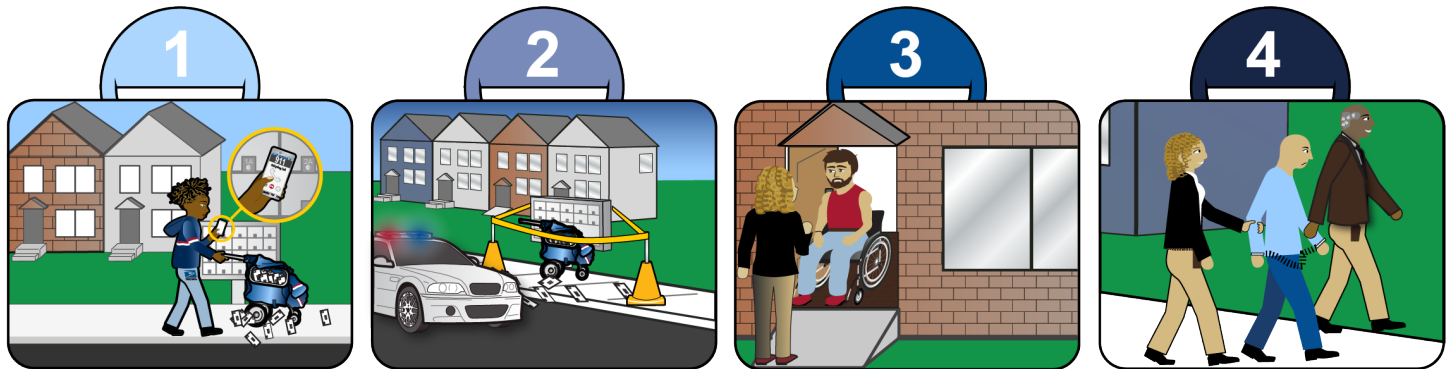
throughout the investigation process. They are also responsible for recording details of the case into the Inspection Service's Case Management System until the case is closed.²⁵

Inspection Service officials told us that frequently, local law enforcement officers are the first to respond to the scene of crimes against USPS employees and property. According to Inspection Service officials, USPS employees call 911 if they witness or are the victim of a crime. Although postal inspectors are present in each of the 16 Inspection Service divisions, officials said that the Inspection Service does not have enough inspectors to respond quickly to every crime. They said calling 911 would provide a faster response to USPS employees after a crime occurred.

Further, officials we interviewed from a local police department and a group representing law enforcement organizations said it is quicker or more efficient for local police to provide the initial response to crimes against postal employees or facilities. They noted that postal inspectors have large territories to cover and might not be able to provide a timely initial response to a crime. After USPS employees make an initial call to 911, the Inspection Service instructs employees to call their supervisors to alert them to the crime. Supervisors are then expected to contact the Inspection Service. Figure 5 shows the general process—from initial report to closure—when a letter carrier is a victim of a robbery.

²⁵According to the Inspection Service Case Management Reporting Guidelines, a case is closed either at the conclusion of the investigation or when an investigation cannot be completed due to factors beyond an inspector's control.

Figure 5: Response to a Letter Carrier Robbery, from Incident to Case Closure



A letter carrier is robbed and calls 911 to report the robbery. The carrier then reports the robbery to a U.S. Postal Service Supervisor, who alerts the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Local law enforcement responds to the scene of the robbery, preserves the crime scene, and gathers initial information. Postal inspectors are assigned to the case and start their investigation by coordinating with local law enforcement.

Postal inspectors continue their investigation, which may include interviewing witnesses, canvassing neighborhoods near the crime scene, searching for further evidence, and distributing reward information.

Postal inspectors partner with the U.S. Attorney's Office, as well as state and local prosecutor offices, to arrest and prosecute individual(s) suspected of the robbery.

Source: GAO depiction of U.S. Postal Inspection Service information. | GAO-24-106497

In addition to the responsibilities described above, Inspection Service officials told us that postal inspectors take other actions to address serious crime. For example, postal inspectors organize special operations in areas where robberies or other serious crime have increased. The goal of these efforts, which began in May 2023, is to surge resources into a division to support ongoing investigations. As of October 2023, the Inspection Service has carried out four of these operations.²⁶ Officials said these operations are designed to disrupt and prevent crimes, gather information from area sources, arrest crime suspects, and provide guidance to USPS employees on how to protect themselves from crime. Further, officials told us the Inspection Service coordinates these operations with other relevant law enforcement agencies. For example, in 2023, the Inspection Service—along with federal and local partner

²⁶Inspection Service officials said they have conducted two operations in San Francisco, one in cities across Ohio, and one in Chicago.

agencies—organized special operations in Chicago in response to a series of letter carrier robberies.²⁷

Inspection Service officials said postal inspectors are also responsible for conducting information sessions with USPS employees, and public outreach to address crime and raise awareness. For example, postal inspectors led mandatory employee information sessions in 2023 that addressed the increasing number of letter carrier robberies. These employee information sessions offered suggestions for reducing the risk of being targeted and provided guidance on how employees should react during and after a robbery.

Also, inspectors generate public awareness campaigns on the Inspection Service’s website, social media platforms, and on printed handouts. These campaigns are designed to raise awareness of mail-related robberies and theft, among other crimes. They also advertise financial rewards for information from the public to help solve mail-related crimes.²⁸

Postal Police Are Responsible for Providing Facility Security and Responding to Serious crime at Some USPS Properties

Postal police provide perimeter and facility security at certain USPS properties—such as processing and distributions centers and large post offices.²⁹ Postal police responsibilities are primarily outlined in two USPS handbooks and include inspecting packages, patrolling property grounds, providing a uniformed presence at property entrances and exits, verifying

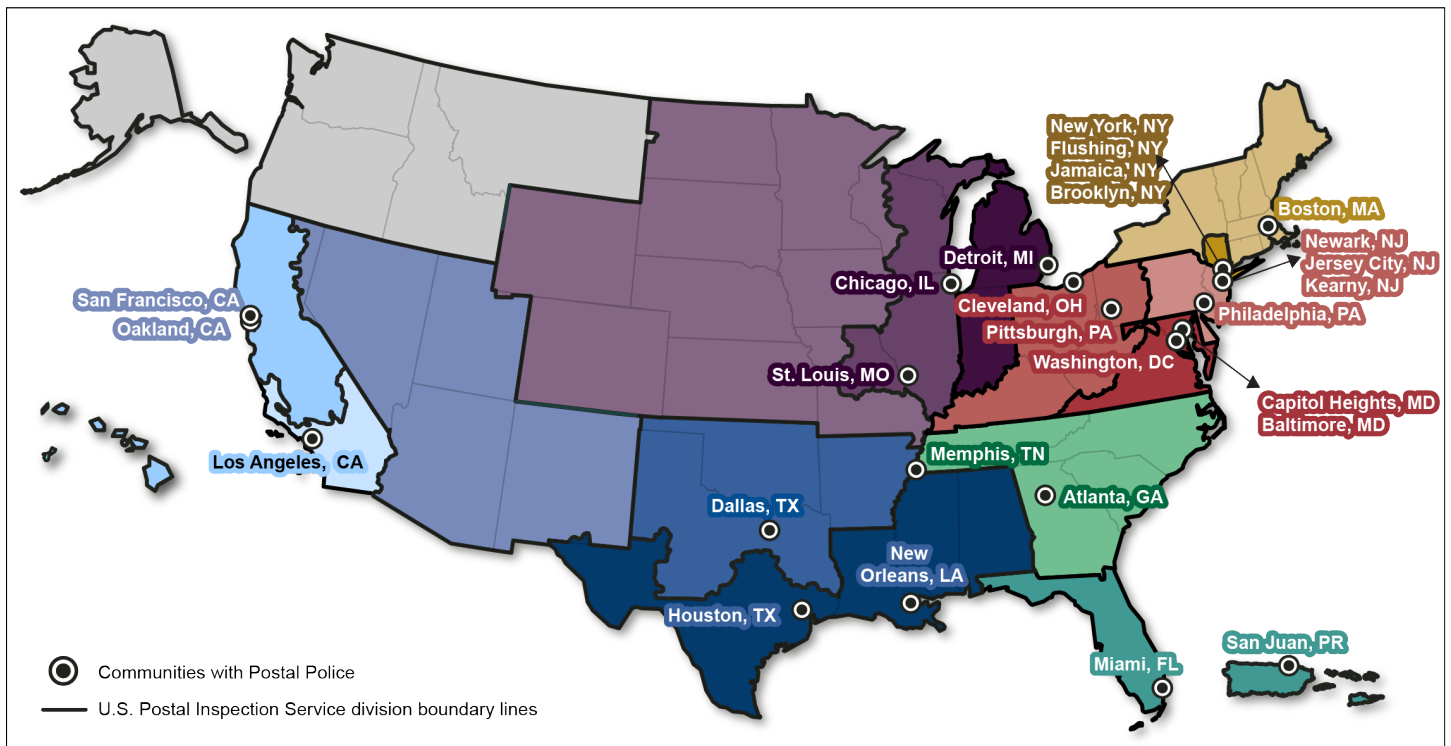
²⁷The USPS Office of Inspector General released a report in September 2023 that detailed USPS and Inspection Service efforts to address mail theft and letter carrier robberies. The report covered prevention efforts such as modernizing security technology and special operations in areas with high incidents of mail theft. For further information, see U.S. Postal Service, Office of Inspector General, *U.S. Postal Service’s Response to Mail Theft*, Audit Report Number 22-178-R23 (Washington, D.C., Sept. 28, 2023).

²⁸In August 2023, the Inspection Service increased financial rewards from \$50,000 to \$150,000 for leads and information on robberies to generate more attention and information for ongoing investigations.

²⁹Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3061(c), USPS may employ police officers for duty in connection with the protection of property owned or occupied by the USPS or under the charge and control of the USPS, and persons on that property, including duty in areas outside the property to the extent necessary to protect the property and persons on the property.

employee and visitor credentials, and other security duties.³⁰ Postal police are present in 13 of the 16 Inspection Service divisions and at the USPS national headquarters.³¹ Across these 13 divisions and national headquarters, postal police are located at 33 USPS properties (see fig. 6). Our analysis found that postal police are most often assigned to USPS processing and distribution centers.³²

Figure 6: U.S. Postal Inspection Service Divisions and Communities with Postal Police at U.S. Postal Service Properties as of January 2024



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service information and Map Resources. | GAO-24-106497

³⁰Postal police responsibilities are outlined in two USPS policy documents: U.S. Postal Service, *Security Force Operations*, Handbook IS-701 (Washington, D.C.: June 2006); *Postal Police Officer Handbook*, Handbook IS-702 (Washington, D.C.: July 2002). According to the Inspection Service, it is revising the Inspection Service Manual to include these two handbooks and expects to issue it in 2024.

³¹The remaining three divisions—Denver, Phoenix, and Seattle—do not have postal police assigned.

³²For context, USPS has a network of facilities that process and sort mail, such as processing and distribution centers and other facilities.

According to Inspection Service policy, postal police are generally responsible for responding to serious crime that occur at the 33 USPS properties.³³ When responding to these crimes, postal police are responsible for intervening, detaining anyone suspected of committing a crime, gathering initial facts about the incident, and securing the scene. Postal police then coordinate with postal inspectors to help initiate the investigative work.³⁴ Postal police are also responsible for documenting and reporting serious crime and other security incidents that occur during their shifts. Division leaders told us they use this information to help assign police officers' daily responsibilities.

Inspection Service officials said that, in some divisions, postal police also carry out security responsibilities at USPS properties within an established radius of their assigned work location.³⁵ For example, postal police in the San Francisco division are assigned to either of two large processing centers: one in San Francisco and the other in Oakland. They can be dispatched to nearby USPS properties, as needed, to perform security checks or address security concerns.

In addition, postal police may also have off-property responsibilities. As outlined in the postal police handbooks, off-property activities are only performed under certain circumstances, including foot pursuit of a suspect or situations where a mobile patrol is warranted. Inspection Service officials at two of the five divisions we interviewed told us that they used their postal police to perform certain off-property activities.³⁶ Officials at one division said they assign postal police to mobile patrols protecting a daily transfer of high-value mail between two locations and

³³If a serious crime occurs at a USPS property without a postal police presence, Inspection Service officials said a postal police officer could serve as first responder in certain circumstances. For example, according to Inspection Service documentation, postal police officers can be dispatched to respond to crimes at other postal properties within a certain radius of the property where a postal police officer is assigned.

³⁴According to the postal police handbook, in some situations, such as emergency responses or when an inspector is not immediately available, postal police may request assistance from local law enforcement.

³⁵Postal police may perform duties at USPS properties within a reasonable response time from their assigned location. Inspection Service officials told us that the response area differs across divisions and is established in the collective bargaining agreement between USPS and the union that represents postal police officers.

³⁶Of the remaining three divisions, two did not use their postal police for any off-property activities and one did not have any postal police assigned to its properties during the time frame of our review.

officials at the other division said they use postal police to escort one high-value shipment a year. In addition, prior to 2020, Inspection Service divisions could assign postal police to patrols along carrier routes. For example, officials from another division we interviewed told us their postal police officers conducted targeted patrols along carrier routes where robberies had previously occurred or where crime was generally more prevalent.³⁷ Officials from two other divisions we interviewed told us postal police officers in their divisions had never performed patrols along carrier routes.³⁸

The Inspection Service issued a management communication memo in August 2020 that clarified the approval process for postal police to conduct work off-property. Prior to this memo, the Inspection Service did not require centralized approval of assigned responsibilities off-property. The memo stated that senior Inspection Service officials must provide direct approval for any off-property postal police activity. Inspection Service officials told us that the issuance of this memo effectively ended any patrols by postal police along carrier routes. Inspection Service officials also said that the memo aligns with USPS's interpretation of the statutory authority given to postal police. USPS has statutory authority to employ police officers for duty in connection with the protection of property owned or occupied by USPS or under the charge and control of USPS, and persons on that property. This includes duty in areas outside the property to the extent necessary to protect the property and persons on the property.³⁹ USPS's interpretation of the statutory authority is that postal police are allowed to perform law enforcement functions only when they are on and protecting USPS property. The August 2020 memo and USPS's interpretation of postal police officers' statutory authority have been the subject of civil litigation in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and arbitration between USPS and the postal police union. More information on the litigation and arbitration is presented in appendix II of this report.

³⁷In 2018, the Inspection Service performed a job analysis that also identified some instances of patrols by postal police along carrier routes.

³⁸One division did not have any postal police assigned to its properties during the time frame of our review, so officials from this division did not provide input on historical use of postal police officers.

³⁹18 U.S.C. § 3061(c)(1).

Inspection Service Has Not Fully Documented Postal Inspector and Postal Police Workforce Determination Processes, or Recently Assessed Police Workforce

Inspection Service Has Not Documented Its Processes for Determining the Size and Location of Postal Inspector Workforce across Divisions

Inspection Service and USPS officials told us the Inspection Service determines how to allocate postal inspectors across its 16 divisions and at national headquarters.⁴⁰ Inspection Service officials described the various processes they use to determine the number of postal inspectors in each division or the placement of postal inspectors across divisions. However, they also told us that they have not documented these processes. These processes include annual division workforce reviews and meetings with division leadership, to ensure that the number of inspectors in each division and their placement across divisions is meeting agency needs.

Inspection Service officials said that each division annually reviews its workforce. Specifically, the senior official at each division (the inspector-in-charge) performs an annual review to determine the number of inspectors the division will need to address investigation needs. To perform the review, officials said that the inspector-in-charge evaluates several factors to identify the appropriate number of inspectors. This includes Inspection Service priorities, workforce data (e.g., attrition, vacancies, workload), as well as customer and victim complaint information. However, Inspection Service officials said that they do not require inspectors-in-charge to document the process they use to perform the annual review, including the factors they considered, or the results of these reviews.

In addition to each division's annual review, Inspection Service leadership conducts a mid-year review of each division's workforce status. Inspection Service leadership officials told us they base their mid-year

⁴⁰USPS officials told us the overall authorized size of the Inspection Service's postal inspector workforce is set by USPS.

review on cases opened by postal inspectors in their Case Management System. The mid-year review can prompt a conversation between headquarters and division officials regarding each division's workforce plan. Inspection Service officials said the mid-year review for fiscal year 2023 considered statistics on the number of cases of robberies, burglaries, assaults, homicides, and vehicle break-ins from fiscal years 2020 through 2023. The review also considered the total number of hours each division used to investigate these and other types of crime such as fraud, mail theft, and prohibited mail. The inspector-in-charge of each division was encouraged to meet with the respective member of Inspection Service leadership to evaluate the data and decide if resources were properly distributed within the division or if additional resources were needed.

The Inspection Service's processes to review postal inspector workforce needs in each division have generally not resulted in changes to the overall size of the inspector workforce and its allocation across divisions. The overall authorized postal inspector workforce and its allocation across divisions and at national headquarters has been relatively unchanged from fiscal years 2017 (1,400 authorized postal inspectors) through 2023 (1,431 authorized postal inspectors).⁴¹ USPS officials noted that, in general, USPS's approach is to maintain its overall staffing levels, given financial constraints, and seek options that repurpose existing vacancies to address agency needs. Inspection Service officials noted they use similar practices when they determine the size and location of the postal inspector workforce across divisions.

Inspection Service officials said they did not document their processes for determining the number and allocation of postal inspectors in divisions because this process is known by both Inspection Service leadership and division inspectors-in-charge. Moreover, they said these reviews meet USPS's needs in this area. When we asked further how Inspection Service leadership ensures these processes are applied consistently, officials said it is the responsibility of Inspection Service leadership to routinely perform these activities. Additionally, they said it was the responsibility of each division's inspector-in-charge to appropriately align

⁴¹The one significant change that occurred for inspector allocation across divisions and at national headquarters from fiscal years 2017 through 2023 was in 2022 when the Inspection Service realigned its divisions. This realignment reduced the number of divisions from 17 to 16 and workforce allocation changed in some divisions based on the new division structure.

inspectors to where they would most successfully carry out the mission of the Inspection Service.

According to the internal control framework that USPS uses, management should document its processes to guide key decision-making activities.⁴² Further, documentation provides a means for an organization to retain knowledge and can provide a basis for leadership to evaluate processes and decisions they made and how they aligned with the organization's needs. Written processes—such as workforce decision-making processes—create explicit standards and expectations for conduct and enable management to effectively document and monitor actions.

An absence of documentation can challenge the integrity of a process and the decisions that are made via that process. Documented processes and results from those processes can ensure that Inspection Service divisions are consistently and appropriately taking action to address their workforce needs. Further, the absence of documentation on the decision-making process used to allocate postal inspectors across divisions can make it difficult for stakeholders, including members of Congress, to have confidence in the Inspection Service's decision to keep the size and allocation of its postal inspector workforce relatively unchanged since 2017.

Inspection Service Has Not Fully Documented Its Process for Determining Its Postal Police Workforce or Updated Its Security Force Assessment

Inspection Service and USPS officials told us that, as with postal inspectors, the Inspection Service makes postal police allocation decisions across and within its 16 divisions and at national headquarters.⁴³ Inspection Service officials told us they determine the size and location of its postal police workforce across divisions by conducting a security force assessment.⁴⁴ The Inspection Service manual

⁴²Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission, *Internal Control-Integrated Framework*.

⁴³Like the postal inspector workforce, USPS officials told us that the overall authorized size of the Inspection Service's postal police workforce is set by USPS.

⁴⁴The Inspection Service Manual defines a security force as personnel responsible for perimeter and building security where assigned. This includes postal police and contract guards.

includes a section describing the security force assessment's role in establishing and maintaining postal police presence at postal facilities and the circumstances when an assessment should be conducted. However, the Inspection Service does not fully document the process the Inspection Service should use to perform the assessment, including the factors that should be considered when performing a security assessment.

Contract Guards at U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Facilities

In addition to postal police, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (Inspection Service) uses contract guards to provide security at some USPS facilities. The inspector-in-charge of each Inspection Service division or the facility manager determines whether a facility requires contract guards to address physical security needs. Inspection Service leadership oversees the guard contract and approves placement of guards at USPS facilities. According to Inspection Service documents, contract guards generally are unarmed and do not have law enforcement powers. They provide similar physical security as postal police (e.g., perimeter patrols and monitoring USPS facility entrances).

In fiscal year 2023, Inspection Service had 518 authorized contract guards allocated across its 16 divisions and national headquarters. Inspection Service information shows that contract guards are located at 48 facilities, 26 of which also have postal police. Inspection Service officials said that in facilities where there are both postal police and contract guards, contract guards perform tasks such as monitoring entrances, which enables postal police to focus on other critical physical security tasks.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service information and interviews. | GAO-24-106497

The Inspection Service completed its most recent security force assessment in 2011. For this assessment, the Inspection Service considered several factors, including risk at the facility and security requirements. To identify the facility risk, officials used a tool to assign a score based on crime rates at the facility, crime rates in the area around the facility, and risks for which an armed security presence is an effective countermeasure. However, because the Inspection Service has not fully documented the process for performing an assessment, the factors used in the 2011 assessment might not necessarily apply to any subsequent security force assessments. Each assessment could consider different factors, and even if they included the same factors, outcomes could differ given the changing nature of some factors, such as crime rates. When we asked for additional details about the process for performing security force assessments, including factors that should be considered, Inspection Service officials directed us back to the Inspection Service manual and had no additional documentation.

According to the internal control framework that USPS uses, management should document its processes to guide key decision-

making activities—such as workforce size and location decisions.⁴⁵ Fully documenting its processes, such as defining the factors that should be considered in the assessment, can ensure assessments results are consistent across years. It can also provide transparency for key decisions about the size and location of the postal police workforce made via those processes.

According to Inspection Service officials, the size and placement of the postal police workforce at USPS facilities in fiscal year 2023 relied on the 2011 assessment. Inspection Service officials told us that the primary goal of the 2011 assessment was to meet a USPS deadline to reduce the number of authorized postal police. To accomplish this, the Inspection Service limited the 2011 assessment to the existing postal facilities—39 at that time—with authorized postal police staff.⁴⁶ Documentation on the results of the assessment shows that the Inspection Service reduced the total number of authorized postal police from 694 to 581.

We found that since 2011, USPS has met conditions that would require a new security force assessment. Specifically, the Inspection Service Manual instructs the Inspection Service to perform a new security force assessment when:

- there is a planned or actual USPS facility move,
- USPS requests security coverage on its properties, or
- the Inspection Service identifies a need for greater security that cannot be achieved through other means.

Since 2011, there have been instances when the first condition—movement of facilities—was met. For example, the USPS Office of Inspector General reported that from 2012 to 2013, USPS consolidated 141 mail processing facilities—which are the facilities where postal police are most likely to be located.⁴⁷ In 2015, USPS further consolidated or

⁴⁵Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission, *Internal Control-Integrated Framework*.

⁴⁶The Inspection Service determined that 19 police officers—four managers/supervisors and 15 bargaining unit postal police officers—was the minimum number of officers needed at a facility based on postal police officer placements in 2011.

⁴⁷USPS Office of Inspector General, *U.S. Postal Service Processing Network Optimization*, Report Number NO-AR-19-006 (Washington, D.C; Sept. 9, 2019).

partially consolidated an additional 38 facilities.⁴⁸ After these consolidations, the overall placement of postal police remained about the same—moving from 39 to 37 USPS facilities—and the total authorized staff stayed the same at 581.

Despite these consolidations, the Inspection Service has not completed an updated security force assessment and instead relied on results from interim efforts. Specifically, Inspection Service officials told us they formed a working group in 2020 to gather information on USPS's facility security needs, which would have been an initial step for a security force assessment. Officials said that working group did not fully complete its efforts before dissolving, yet officials used its limited results to conclude that the fiscal year 2020 postal police authorized workforce—both size and placement, which has been about the same since 2011—was meeting USPS security needs. Inspection Service officials said they did not complete the 2020 working group effort because USPS's 2021 strategic plan included, among its hundreds of projects, plans to change the number and location of postal facilities.⁴⁹ Inspection Service officials said that in light of those plans, they were waiting to start a security force assessment until USPS was further along in implementing the strategic plan. Officials said that waiting to start the assessment would enable the Inspection Service to better understand USPS needs and where postal facilities will be located.

In the meantime, Inspection Service officials told us they are establishing a working group to perform a security force assessment. As of February 2024, the working group was in early stages, and Inspection Service officials said they could not provide us with any time frames—such as the target completion date for an assessment—until the working group is fully established. As a part of this process, they told us Inspection Service leadership will work with staff to establish the purpose statement and scope of the security force assessment.

Until then, the size and location of the postal police workforce are still informed by 2011 information, such as crime rates from that time. Internal control standards note that current information is necessary to maintain

⁴⁸U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, *U.S. Postal Service Processing Network Optimization*, Report Number NO-AR-19-006 (Washington, D.C.; Sept. 9, 2019).

⁴⁹U.S. Postal Service, *Delivering for America* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2021).

an effective internal control system.⁵⁰ Without current information about its postal police workforce and the volume and types of crimes it encounters, the Inspection Service does not have reasonable assurance that its current staffing levels are appropriate to meet its mission and USPS security workforce needs. Further, without a time frame for completing a security force assessment that would yield such current information related to postal police, the Inspection Service may be missing an opportunity to ensure its postal police workforce aligns with current security needs.

Conclusions

USPS's ability to meet its universal service obligation is due in large part to the efforts of its letter carriers delivering mail across the country, and their ability to do so safely. Given the recent upward trend in serious crime against USPS employees and property, ensuring that the Inspection Service aligns its law enforcement resources with security needs is increasingly important. The Inspection Service has taken actions to address the upward trend in crimes, such as conducting investigations and special operations in certain locations in response to a series of letter carrier robberies.

The Inspection Service has not documented the processes it uses each year to determine the size and location across divisions of the postal inspector workforce needed to meet investigation needs. However, the Inspection Service could benefit from documenting its processes—such as the factors considered, and the results of those processes. Such actions can help the Inspection Service ensure that the workforce decisions it is making to address serious crime are sound. Similarly, fully documenting its processes for determining the size and location of its postal police workforce, including the factors considered in that process, would provide some assurances that decisions made aligned with agency needs. Finally, establishing a time frame for completing an updated security force assessment for the postal police will help ensure that the Inspection Service conducts a new assessment that will address current USPS security needs.

⁵⁰Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission, *Internal Control-Integrated Framework*.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following three recommendations to USPS:

The Postmaster General should ensure the Chief Postal Inspector documents the Inspection Service's processes for determining the size and location of the postal inspector workforce across divisions, including factors that should be considered, and document the results of those processes. (Recommendation 1)

The Postmaster General should ensure the Chief Postal Inspector fully documents the Inspection Service's processes for determining the size and location of the postal police workforce, including factors that should be considered. (Recommendation 2)

The Postmaster General should ensure the Chief Postal Inspector sets a time frame for completing a security force assessment to determine the size and location of the postal police workforce. (Recommendation 3)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to USPS and the Inspection Service for review and comment. The Inspection Service agreed with all three of our recommendations and stated the Inspection Service plans to take action to implement them. The Inspection Service's comments are reproduced in appendix III. USPS agreed with Inspection Service and provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Postmaster General, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact David Marroni at (202) 512-2834 or marronid@gao.gov or Derrick Collins at (202) 512-8777 or collinsd@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff making key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Letter



David Marroni
Director
Physical Infrastructure



Derrick Collins
Director
Homeland Security and Justice

List of Requesters

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
House of Representatives

The Honorable Shontel M. Brown
House of Representatives

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly
House of Representatives

The Honorable Steny H. Hoyer
House of Representatives

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
House of Representatives

The Honorable Katie Porter
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

You asked us to review issues related to postal crime and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's (Inspection Service) use of postal inspectors and postal police. This report addresses (1) recent trends in serious crime against U.S. Postal Service (USPS) employees and property, (2) the responsibilities of postal inspectors and postal police in responding to serious crime, and (3) the extent to which the Inspection Service has processes for determining the size and location of its postal inspector and postal police workforce.

To describe recent trends in serious crime against USPS employees and property, we analyzed nationwide data from the Inspection Service's Case Management System. Postal inspectors use this system to enter and track all reported crimes against USPS employees and property.¹ The data included cases opened by inspectors of robberies, burglaries, assaults, and homicides which, for the purposes of this report, we refer to as "serious crime against USPS employees and property" or "serious crime." We analyzed cases from fiscal years 2017 through 2023. We chose 2017 because it captured case data before the Inspection Service issued a 2020 memo on postal police work occurring off USPS property. This memo was based on a 2017 USPS analysis on postal police statutory authority and responsibilities. We also chose fiscal year 2023 as it was the most recent year of available data. We focused our analysis on the crimes of assault, burglary, homicide, and robbery as these crimes

¹Inspection Service officials said that situations could occur in which a serious crime against a USPS employee was not reported to the Inspection Service and therefore not recorded in its Case Management System. However, they stated that they believed such situations were rare and were confident that the information in the Case Management System was sufficiently complete.

target USPS personnel and property and are grouped together under the Inspection Service's violent crime program.²

To assess the reliability of these data, we reviewed Inspection Service documentation, interviewed Inspection Service officials responsible for maintaining the data, and conducted electronic and manual testing of the data to check for missing values, outliers, or other obvious errors. We determined that these data were sufficiently reliable for the purpose of describing trends in the numbers and types of cases opened by postal inspectors. Further, we determined the data were sufficiently reliable for describing general trends in serious crime committed against USPS employees and property, such as whether they occurred on or away from USPS property and whether a firearm was used.

In the course of our analysis, we made decisions to exclude some case management data, which included:

- Threats, alleged threats, and possession or discharge of weapons on USPS property. We determined that these incidents were more likely to be subjective and thus may not be reported consistently compared with the other serious crime we included in our review.
- Suicides and attempted suicides as they were outside the scope of this review.
- Theft of mail not categorized as burglary or robbery to avoid duplicating work that the USPS Office of Inspector General was conducting on that issue at the time of our review.³
- Cases that the Inspection Service refers to as area cases, which cover routine investigative, or crime prevention, activities as opposed to cases that are opened in response to specific incidents.

²The Inspection Service opens a case for all homicides of USPS employees, regardless of location, including those that occur off duty. Not all homicides documented during the period of our review occurred while the USPS employee was performing the job. The information in the data available to us did not allow us to determine which homicide cases occurred while the employee was on duty, so we included all homicide cases in our analysis. In fiscal year 2023, according to the Inspection Service, inspectors opened 15 total homicide cases in response to employee deaths, of which 13 took place while the employees were off duty.

³U.S. Postal Service, Office of Inspector General, *U.S. Postal Service's Response to Mail Theft*, 22-178-R23 (Arlington, VA: Sept. 28, 2023).

- Cases that Inspection Service officials told us had been entered into the system as drafts but not finalized or cases that were marked as having been opened in error.

To describe the responsibilities of postal inspectors and postal police, we analyzed Inspection Service policies, procedures, and guidance. For example, we reviewed the agency policy manuals, employee handbooks, special operating procedures, and relevant Inspection Service memos that outline postal inspector and postal police responsibilities. We also reviewed relevant federal laws, USPS and Inspection Service memoranda, and Inspection Service responses to civil litigation and labor grievances. For example, we reviewed documentation of federal court proceedings and interest arbitration proceedings involving the Inspection Service and the union that represents postal police.⁴

To assess the extent to which the Inspection Service has processes for determining the size and location of its postal inspector and postal police workforce, we reviewed the Inspection Service's available documentation on workforce processes and procedures. Further, we conducted interviews with Inspection Service officials about what additional processes and procedures they had in place. We reviewed the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission's *Internal Control-Integrated Framework* to identify internal controls relevant to the Inspection Service's workforce decision-making processes.⁵ To do so, we reviewed documentation and interviewed USPS and Inspection Service officials to understand the factors the Inspection Service considers in making workforce decisions, as well as how they document the workforce decision-making process. We also compared the Inspection

⁴The Postal Police Officers Association and the Inspection Service entered arbitration proceedings in 2021 and 2023 to reach agreement on a collective bargaining agreement. The parties previously engaged in legal proceedings in federal district court in 2020.

⁵Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission, *Internal Control-Integrated Framework* (2013). This framework is a set of practices that we identified as reasonable and relevant internal-control criteria standards to evaluate USPS's activities and is the internal control framework USPS uses. It is also recognized as a leading framework for designing, implementing, and conducting internal controls and assessing the effectiveness of internal controls. GAO adapted this framework for use in the federal government. See GAO, *Standards for Internal Controls in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 14, 2014).

Service's efforts against factors outlined in the Inspection Service Manual for when a security force assessment should be conducted.⁶

For all three objectives, we interviewed a range of relevant stakeholders. We interviewed Inspection Service leadership, including the Chief Postal Inspector and Chief Counsel, and others located in the national headquarters (Washington, D.C.). We also interviewed senior officials, including division inspectors-in-charge and postal police managers, at five of the Inspection Service's 16 Inspection Service divisions.⁷ We selected a nongeneralizable sample of divisions, to ensure variation in geographic location, the number of postal inspectors and postal police, and the number of serious crime cases opened by postal inspectors in the Case Management System from fiscal years 2017 through 2022.⁸ We also interviewed representatives of postal employee organizations and the union that represents postal police officers, a local police department, and a group representing law enforcement organizations, as well as representatives from the USPS Office of Inspector General.⁹ We selected the local police department based on feedback from Inspection Service division officials, and we selected the group representing law enforcement organizations to get a broader view of how the Inspection Service interfaces with local law enforcement.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2023 to May 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

⁶U.S. Postal Inspection Service, *United States Postal Inspection Service Manual* (Washington, D.C.: July 2023).

⁷We interviewed Inspection Service officials including the inspector-in-charge and postal police managers in the following divisions: Denver; Houston; New York; San Francisco; and Washington, D.C.

⁸Fiscal year 2023 data were not available when we made our selection.

⁹Postal inspectors are not unionized and do not have an employee group that advocates for this workforce.

Appendix II: Summary of Litigation and Arbitration on the Use of U.S. Postal Police

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service (Inspection Service) issued a management communication memo in August 2020 that clarified the approval process for utilization of postal police officers (postal police) to work off U.S. Postal Service (USPS) property. The August 2020 memo and the USPS interpretation of postal police officers' statutory authority have been the subject of civil litigation in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and arbitration between USPS and the postal police union.

In September 2020, the postal police officers labor union—the Postal Police Officers Association (PPOA)—brought an action against USPS related to postal police officers' exercise of law enforcement functions. The PPOA alleged that the August 2020 memo's directive for senior Inspection Service officials to approve any off-property postal police activity exceeded USPS's statutory authority by unduly restraining postal police officers' law enforcement jurisdiction.¹

In the case, the PPOA sought for the court to set aside the memo or temporarily enjoin the policy while the parties arbitrated the issue, or alternatively, issue a preliminary injunction or temporary restraining order to grant postal police officers off-premises authority during the litigation. The court determined that the statutory provision that permitted USPS to employ postal police officers to protect USPS property was ambiguous as to whether USPS could or was required to grant officers authority to engage in activities unrelated to real property.² In addition, the court held that USPS's reading of the statute was a reasonable interpretation and entitled to deference. As a result, the court granted USPS's motion to

¹Postal Police Officers Ass'n v. United States Postal Service, 502 F. Supp.3d 411 (D.D.C. 2020).

²In dismissing the PPOA's claim, the court noted that "USPS's action follows from a reasonable interpretation of the governing statute, if not the only reasonable interpretation." 502 F. Supp. 3d at 418.

dismiss the case and denied PPOA's motion for a temporary restraining order or preliminary injunction.

In September 2020, the PPOA also filed a labor grievance for arbitration and argued that the memo violated the collective bargaining agreement between the PPOA and USPS. When USPS and the PPOA could not resolve the grievance, the PPOA appealed the grievance to national arbitration. According to the arbitrator, the collective bargaining agreement prohibited USPS from unilaterally making certain changes to postal police officers' terms and conditions of employment without adhering to the terms of the collective bargaining agreement. In addition, the arbitrator noted that the collective bargaining agreement provided that USPS handbooks, manuals, and regulations directly related to postal police officers' wages, hours, and working conditions must be consistent with the agreement. The collective bargaining agreement also provided a process for the PPOA to object to any proposed change that might conflict with the agreement. In the event of a dispute about the interpretation of the collective bargaining agreement, the PPOA may file a grievance, which is subject to arbitration.

In February 2023, an arbitrator ruled that the memo's directive was a unilateral change of terms and conditions of employment, and thus a violation of the collective bargaining agreement.³ The arbitrator ordered USPS to rescind the memo and follow the postal police handbooks regarding use of postal police officers. In March 2023, the PPOA filed a petition to enforce the arbitration award in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. USPS has stated that they have already rescinded the memo and filed a motion to dismiss the matter as moot.

In February 2024, the court found that the PPOA's petition was not moot, noting that the arbitrator's award contained two directives to USPS: (1) that the management communication memo be rescinded and (2) that the utilization of postal police be governed by the two USPS postal police handbooks.⁴ The court noted that there is no dispute that USPS has complied with the first directive related to the rescission of the management communication memo. However, the court found there is an

³Arbitration between United States Postal Service and Postal Police Officers Association, Q14K-4Q-C 20388760 (National Arbitration Panel 2023).

⁴Postal Police Officers Association v. United States Postal Service, Civil Action No. 23-0675 CRC. The Inspection Service handbooks related to postal police are the IS-701 and IS-702.

**Appendix II: Summary of Litigation and
Arbitration on the Use of U.S. Postal Police**

issue as to whether USPS complied with the utilization of postal police as governed by the handbooks. In addition, the court stated that the parties have two competing interpretations of the arbitrator's award and dispute what the award required of USPS when it directed the utilization of postal police be governed by the provisions of the handbooks.⁵ As a result, the court found the award susceptible to more than one interpretation and ambiguous. Thus, the court remanded the case to the original arbitrator for clarification on the issue of USPS's compliance with the award.

⁵The court found the award susceptible to more than one interpretation and ambiguous. Thus, the court granted in part and denied in part the PPOA's petition to confirm and enforce the arbitration decision, denied USPS's motion to dismiss.

Appendix III: Comments from the U.S. Postal Service

Appendix III: Comments from the U.S. Postal Service



GARY R. BARKSDALE
CHIEF POSTAL INSPECTOR

UNITED STATES POSTAL INSPECTION SERVICE

May 7, 2024

David Marroni
Acting Director, Physical Infrastructure
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548-0001

Derrick Collins
Acting Director, Homeland Security and Justice
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548-0001

SUBJECT: Draft report review of *Inspection Service Should Document Its Law Enforcement Workforce Decision-Making Processes* (GAO-24-106497) – April 2024

Dear Mr. Marroni and Mr. Collins,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report titled *Inspection Service Should Document Its Law Enforcement Workforce Decision-Making Processes*. Our responses to the GAO's recommendations for executive action are set forth below.

Specific Responses

Recommendation 1

The Postmaster General should ensure the Chief Postal Inspector documents the Inspection Service's processes for determining the size and location of the postal inspector workforce across divisions, including factors that should be considered, and document the results of those processes.

Management's Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service will document their processes for determining the size and location of the postal inspector workforce across divisions, including factors that should be considered, and document the results of those processes.

Expected completion date: April 30, 2025

Recommendation 2

The Postmaster General should ensure the Chief Postal Inspector fully documents the Inspection Service's processes for determining the size and location of the postal police

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Appendix III: Comments from the U.S. Postal Service

- 2 -

workforce, including factors that should be considered.

Management's Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service will fully document their processes for determining the size and location of the postal police workforce, including factors that should be considered.

Expected completion date: April 30, 2025

Recommendation 3

The Postmaster General should ensure the Chief Postal Inspector sets a time frame for completing a security force assessment to determine the size and location of the postal police workforce.

Management's Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service will set a time frame for completing a security force assessment to determine the size and location of the postal police workforce.

Enter completion date: April 30, 2025

The Postal Inspection Service appreciates the opportunity to respond to GAO's draft report and recommendations for executive action.

Sincerely,



Gary R. Barksdale
Chief Postal Inspector

cc: Corporate Audit & Response Management

Accessible Text for Appendix III: Comments from the U.S. Postal Service

May 7, 2024

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Sincerely,

Gary R. Barksdale
Chief Postal Inspector

cc: Corporate Audit & Response Management

**Accessible Text for Appendix III: Comments
from the U.S. Postal Service**

Appendix IV: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

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