GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

November 17, 2026

The Honorable Gus M. Bilirakis
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0912

Dear Congressman Bilirakis:

This responds to your October 22 letter to Postmaster General David P. Steiner, regarding postal operations in the Aripeka community.

As noted in your inquiry, the Aripeka Post Office was damaged beyond repair by Hurricane Helene in late September 2024. Retail service at the facility was suspended on October 9, 2024, and service to the community was transferred to the Hudson Branch. It is important to note that service was uninterrupted, though it may have been less convenient for some customers.

The facility housing the Aripeka Post Office is a leased property, and under the lease terms, it is the owner's responsibility to make any necessary repairs. Considering the substantial damage inflicted, the owner decided not to repair the facility. With retail service suspended and no prospects for a return to the original facility, the Postal Service conducted an alternate quarters search to evaluate potential new locations.

Suitability for a post office location is determined by many factors, including whether the space meets minimum size requirements; whether the lot allows for sufficient parking, space for vehicle maneuvering, and truck loading/unloading; the overall condition of the building or site, including issues such as mold, asbestos, or location within a floodplain; whether a prospective landlord is willing to lease us a space and accept the needed terms; and whether the proposed rental rate is within local market conditions. Despite a diligent search, the Postal Service has been unable to secure a suitable new location.

After two years of a failed alternate quarters search, and given the experience of serving the Aripeka community through nearby facilities, Retail and Post Office Operations, which oversees Post Offices across the country, decided in September 2026 to undertake a feasibility study to investigate the discontinuance of the Aripeka Post Office.

The discontinuance process to close or consolidate a Post Office is highly prescriptive and ultimately governed by the stipulations mandated by federal law, 39 USC § 404 (a)(3) and (d). Specifically, Congress recognized that the Postal Service must be responsible for determining the need for retail Post Offices, but it should balance any decision to close a facility by considering the effects on the local community, on employees, and on the particular needs of rural communities. In practice, this has been operationalized into distinct phases to ensure fair consideration.

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When the Postal Service considers a Post Office consolidation, it first proposes to study the closing and explains how it would provide service in the impacted community. The community is asked for its views through both a public meeting and questionnaires. Next, with that information in hand, the Postal Service reassesses the proposal to make a final determination. Then, if the determination is to move forward with the closure, that decision is announced along with the supporting analysis, and there is a 60-day period for the community and other interested parties to consider and respond. Even at this stage, the Postal Service can revise its proposal in light of new information or views presented by the community.

Additionally, the final determination lays out the further recourse of an appeal to the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC). If appealed, the PRC has 120 days to review the Postal Service's decision and render a final opinion. If the PRC dismisses the appeal or affirms the final determination, the official closing date of the installation will be published in the *Postal Bulletin*. Alternatively, the PRC may remand the final determination for further action by the Postal Service. No Post Office may be discontinued before the conclusion of a PRC appeal. In all, the discontinuance process can take approximately 280 days from the start of the study.

On August 19, you spoke with Director of Government Relations Liaison Scott Slusher regarding the Aripeka Post Office. Mr. Slusher thanked you for highlighting this situation, and in subsequent considerations, your interest was factored into the decision to begin the process that will provide the community with a definitive resolution. Your staff were then notified on August 31 that the discontinuance notice would be sent to customers on Friday, September 4; we also made sure that your office received a copy of the notice once it was officially announced. Aripeka customers and your office received the initial *Notice of Discontinuance Feasibility Study*, announced on September 4, which included a notification to affected customers. The notification provided context and described the ways the public could provide comments. Importantly, that notification explained how to participate in the virtual public meeting on September 9 at 10:00 a.m. Only five community members attended, and neither you nor your staff attended the meeting. Those who could not attend had the opportunity to complete a customer questionnaire and return it no later than October 9, 2026, using the postage-paid envelope provided.

The public meeting and solicitation-of-public-comment phase is now complete. Following the established process, the Postal Service is now assessing the information gathered but has yet to make a final determination. Once a final determination has been made, you may be assured that customers will be notified in accordance with the established process described above. When a decision is made and the proposal is posted, customers have 60 days to submit additional comments. These comment forms can be picked up at the Hudson Post Office.

Following the community meeting, I notified your staff on September 10 that we had been alerted some Aripeka customers were having a problem with package delivery at the Hudson Post Office. As you know, there is no street delivery in Aripeka, so customers receive mail through Group E ("no-fee") Post Office Boxes. However, some merchants will ship only to street addresses. If customer receives mail via a Post Office Box, but nonetheless uses his or her street address to order a package, then when the package arrives at the Post Office, the postal clerk has no way to know which Post Office Box corresponds with the address on the package. Such packages can be returned to the sender. To solve this issue, we "map" street addresses to corresponding Group E Post Office Boxes so that clerks can sort the packages correctly. I then followed up with your staff on October 7 to confirm that the mapping had been completed.

At this time, carrier delivery has been approved for the Aripeka community, and Retail and Delivery officials at postal headquarters are working with Florida 2 District officials to determine viable options for either cluster box or curbside delivery. They do not have a timeline for when delivery will be established; therefore, while a final decision is being made, customers can continue to pick up their mail at the Hudson Post Office. I will keep you updated as developments occur.

Thank you for writing. If I can assist you with other postal matters, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Kayla Dufrene
Government Relations Representative