



**One Hundred Sixteenth Congress  
Committee on Homeland Security  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515**

May 29, 2020

The Honorable Emily W. Murphy  
Administrator  
U.S. General Services Administration  
1800 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20405

The Honorable Mark A. Morgan  
Acting Commissioner  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20229

Mr. Rick Cotton  
Executive Director  
The Port Authority of New York and New  
Jersey  
4 World Trade Center  
150 Greenwich Street, 23rd Floor  
New York, NY 10007

The Honorable Megan J. Brennan  
Postmaster General and Chief Executive  
Officer  
U.S. Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Administrator Murphy, Acting Commissioner Morgan, Executive Director Cotton, and Postmaster General Brennan:

We write to you today concerned by the prolonged timeline for construction of the new laboratory at the John F. Kennedy International Airport's (JFK) International Mail Facility (IMF) maintained by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the Laboratories and Scientific Services Directorate (LSSD). Specifically, we are worried about potential adverse effects a later completion date might have on the flow of illicit fentanyl and other opioids into the country.

As you are aware, opioids – fentanyl in particular – have caused incredible pain and suffering in our respective districts and across the country. In response to this epidemic, we held a joint oversight hearing last July on the homeland security implications of the opioid crisis. During this hearing, we learned from the DHS Assistant Inspector General for Audits that the United States Postal Service (USPS) International Service Center at JFK is “the largest of nine USPS facilities nationwide that receive and process incoming international mail... [processing] more than half of the hundreds of millions of pieces of international mail arriving annually at all international mail

facilities.”<sup>1</sup> Understanding that the majority of illicit fentanyl is produced in places like China and then smuggled through ports of entry including the IMFs, it is vital that our front line workers tasked with identifying and preventing the flow of these substances into the country are supported with an adequate laboratory to carry out this mission.

Following this joint hearing, Chairman Rose and staff from both Subcommittees toured the JFK IMF last August. During the tour, we discovered that the laboratory lacked the space and equipment to conduct necessary inspections onsite and that much of the advanced testing required for suspicious incoming mail was sent to an offsite facility. We learned that updating and properly equipping the laboratory would reduce the screening process from nearly two weeks to just several hours.<sup>2</sup> We were pleased to later learn that CBP had provided GSA with funds to update the laboratory before the end of this year.

However, we are disappointed that nearly a year later there has been little progress on its construction. Based on information communicated to staff, we are aware that higher-than-expected bids required a shift in the contracting approach, which has now pushed the project completion date back by at least seven months, from December 2020 to July 2021. We are encouraged to hear that GSA awarded a design contract for the project this month, but know there is much more work to be done.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we are reminded that the opioid epidemic also continues to devastate communities around the country.<sup>3</sup> During this time, vulnerable populations are experiencing additional socio-economic stressors, including isolation, making them more susceptible to relapse or use.<sup>4</sup> It is incumbent upon the federal government to implement measures to mitigate the crisis. Each of you has a role to play in the coordination – and in some cases approvals – of this project and it is our hope that you will be collaborative partners to ensure there are no further delays. This work will directly contribute to lives saved not only in our districts but across the United States.

We understand and respect the constraints placed on you and those on the front lines of this effort during the COVID-19 pandemic. With that in mind, we urge you to keep this project on track while adhering to appropriate safety measures. Moving forward, we request that you or your designees schedule monthly check-in calls with our staff to keep us abreast of your efforts. Furthermore, we request a briefing on this project once the design of the laboratory is approved, no later than August 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> *Testimony Of Assistant Inspector General for Audits Sondra McCauley Before The Committee On Homeland Security*, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, Jul. 15, 2019, <https://homeland.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Testimony-McCauley1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Max Rose Rips Officials for Stalling On Tech That Could Prevent Fentanyl Trafficking*, NEW YORK POST, Aug. 27, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/08/27/max-rose-rips-officials-for-stalling-on-tech-that-could-prevent-fentanyl-trafficking/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Coronavirus – Stamped Heroin/Fentanyl Glassines Seized In The Bronx: Six Individuals Charged*, U.S. DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY, May 8, 2020, <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2020/05/08/coronavirus-stamped-heroinfentanyl-glassines-seized-bronx-six-individuals>; *The Opioid Epidemic Was Already A National Crisis. COVID-19 Could be Making Things Worse*, CNN, May 7, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/07/health/opioid-epidemic-covid19-pandemic-trnd/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *A Tale Of Two Epidemics: When COVID-19 and Opioid Addiction Collide*, HARVARD HEALTH BLOG, Apr. 20, 2020, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/a-tale-of-two-epidemics-when-covid-19-and-opioid-addiction-collide-2020042019569>.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and your team to better secure the Homeland and ensure that our front line workers have the facilities necessary to keep the American public safe.

Sincerely,



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MAX ROSE  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Intelligence & Counterterrorism  
Committee on Homeland Security



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KATHLEEN RICE  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation,  
and Operations  
Committee on Homeland Security