

# League Position Paper



## Closing Rural Post Offices

Updated January 25, 2010

**Issue:** Whether the Postal Service should close small post offices.  
**Bill Numbers & Sponsors:** No bills have been introduced in either chamber of Congress that propose to close small post offices. However, given the current economic crisis, it is entirely possible that some well-meaning but uninformed Federal Legislator might think that closing small post offices is a good idea. There are indications that the Postal Service might be focusing more on such closings.

**LEAGUE Position:** The LEAGUE opposes the closing of small post offices.  
**Status:** During the recent debate on postal reform, the League tirelessly worked to ensure that no provisions closing small post offices were added to the postal reform bills. The League closely follows current legislative developments to ensure that any such legislation that may be introduced is soundly defeated.

**Facts:** Some believe that operating rural post offices is very expensive and that closing many of them would save a considerable amount of money. As brought out by the President's Commission on the Postal Service, this is not true. The cost of operating the smallest 10,000 post offices is less than one percent of the Postal Service's annual budget.

This fact was acknowledged during postal reform, and efforts to include small post office closing provisions were not allowed into the bill. Currently, the Postal Service is developing a plan to realign processing facilities, which could result in processing plant closures. This plan has nothing to do with post offices.

**Analysis and Argument:** There are two points to make in arguing for protecting rural post offices. First, it is vital to fully explain their importance, and that their importance goes far beyond the role they play in the postal system. Second, it is critical to realize that this vital rural resource costs mailers and the Postal Service very little.

- Rural post offices are the backbone of rural America and are an integral part of the social, political, and economic fabric of small towns. They are the glue that holds the nation's rural communities together. If a rural post office disappears, the town often disappears.

National League of Postmasters  
5904 Richmond Highway Suite 500 • Alexandria, VA 22303-1864  
703-329-4550 703-329-0466 (f)  
[www.postmasters.org](http://www.postmasters.org)

Rural customers are not second-class citizens; they deserve access to the postal services that citizens in big cities enjoy. Rural America contains 80 percent of the nation's land and is home to somewhere around 56 million people. Rural Americans are 26 percent of the population and make up 34 percent of Americans with incomes below the official poverty line.

Small towns also have the highest concentrations of elderly people. Rural post offices often serve as a gathering point for retirees and act as a source of information that goes far beyond postal issues. Rural post offices fulfill a need for this segment of the population that goes far beyond postal services.

An attack on rural post offices is an attack on rural America, as most rural citizens and all rural Congressmen know well.

- Because the smallest 10,000 post offices cost the Postal Service less than one percent of its budget to operate, this is not a money issue. Put another way, *even if every rural post office in every single rural community* in America were closed, the Postal Service would save very little. Moreover, if post office boxes were not available in rural areas, the cost of paying a rural carrier to deliver the mail to their residences would be much more expensive.

By balancing the absolutely vital role that rural post offices play in America against the minuscule amount of money it costs the Postal Service to operate them, one should come to the conclusion that the rural post office network be maintained and that the Postal Service should not close rural post offices.

We believe that the network of rural post offices we have across this country is a valuable asset, and that we should be looking at ways rural post offices can assist government at all levels, local, state and federal.

One example could be helping Homeland Security. Should the nation experience a disaster, rural post offices would be a natural place to disseminate information and perhaps even have supplies pre-positioned. By partnering with government and private industry, we can more fully utilize our network of post offices.