

Press Release

March 10, 2010

PRC Issues Advisory Opinion Affirming Customer Rights in U.S. Postal Service Retail Office Closing Decisions

Washington, DC – The Postal Regulatory Commission today issued an [Advisory Opinion](#) to the U.S. Postal Service in its “Station and Branch Optimization and Consolidation Initiative” in [Docket N2009-1](#).

The Postal Service is required to seek an Advisory Opinion if its actions constitute a nationwide change in service levels. This advisory opinion responds to the Service’s 2009 request for an opinion on its Initiative to review more than 3,000 stations and branches nationwide for possible closure. The Postal Service reports that (as of February 2010) only 162 remain under review; however, the program will be applied to additional retail facilities in the coming months.

The Commission gathered a wide range of input from the public in hearings and written submissions before reaching its conclusions.

“I urge the Postal Service to take our recommendations to heart and implement them quickly in order to respond to public concerns and build goodwill. This public process is an example of how the Postal Service’s and the Commission’s complementary authorities improve policy in an open and transparent manner,” said Chairman Ruth Y. Goldway.

The Commission affirms the Postal Service’s authority to adjust its retail network but recommends several improvements. The Commission finds that the current ten days advance customer notice is insufficient and limits opportunities for community consultation. Further, inconsistent financial and operational analyses impair evaluations of facility closures and consolidations. The Commission finds that standardized review procedures should be developed and consistently applied nationwide to ensure adequate and efficient service levels and comply with statutory guidelines.

“The Postal Service’s nomenclature differentiates among stations, branches and post offices. But customers do not recognize any difference. They expect and deserve the same public notice, opportunity for comment and rights of appeal if and when postal facilities they depend on may be closed.” Goldway said.

(more)

The key recommendations in the Advisory Opinion are:

- 1) The Postal Service should articulate its Initiative's objectives more clearly
- 2) Postal Headquarters should develop and disseminate guidance for local managers
- 3) The method used for evaluating proposals for consolidations and closures should include a separate category for community issues
- 4) Public notice should be improved:
 - By providing actual (as opposed to “constructive”) notice; and wherever possible, expanding methods of providing public notice
 - Through longer notice and comment periods
 - By soliciting public comments earlier in the process
- 5) Financial analysis of station and branch operations should be improved
- 6) The Postal Service should implement uniform procedures for closing or consolidating all types of retail facilities – post office, station or branch
- 7) Customers should be assured that the Postal Service will adhere to its published procedures
- 8) The Postal Service should coordinate this Initiative with any other initiatives affecting access (such as removing collection boxes or changing retail hours)

Quick links to key documents

Postal Regulatory Commission [Chairman's letter](#) to the President and Congress

[The Commission's Advisory Opinion](#)

Field hearing transcripts:

[The Bronx, New York](#)

[Independence, Ohio](#)