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Trump hampering U.S. Postal Service to ‘undermine a federal election,’ N.J. says in lawsuit

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New Jersey and a handful of other states and local governments sued the U.S. Postal Service Tuesday, accusing President Donald Trump’s administration of deliberately hampering the agency “to undermine a federal election.”

The lawsuit asks the court to undo recent changes accused of slowing delivery nationwide, including the removal of sorting machines, collection boxes and reduction in overtime.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy said last week he would stop many of those controversial policies, but state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal concluded only a lawsuit could ensure the agency would be ready for a surge in mail-in ballots because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The postal service’s “dramatic changes threaten to disenfranchise voters,” Grewal said in a statement, while also hurting “vulnerable citizens” who “rely on the mail for prescription drugs and other things that help them survive.”

Tuesday’s complaint targeted Trump, DeJoy and the postal service. A spokesman for the agency declined comment on the lawsuit but pointed to a recent postal service statement saying they have “more than enough capacity to handle election mail volume” and that removing collection boxes is “decades-old protocol.”

A White House representative did not immediately return a request for comment.

The postal service has removed or is removing more than two dozen important machines, including bar code sorters and automated sorters, from distribution centers in Kearny, Teterboro, Bellmawr, Hamilton and New Castle, Delaware, according to the lawsuit, and packages that should have been delivered July 18 had still not left a Jersey City center more than four weeks later.

Those and other actions should be reversed because they were “unconstitutional” and failed to follow laws requiring the agency to run nationwide policies by the Postal Regulatory Commission, the complaint said. The states also said the changes inhibited their ability to run an election.

The lawsuit adds to a growing tangle of legal maneuvers embroiling an agency rarely pulled into partisan politics.

The U.S. House of Representatives on Saturday voted to increase postal service funding and roll back the same changes targeted by the lawsuit, a move supported by New Jersey's Republican representatives. Trump has said he'll block increased funding in order to cripple mail-in voting.

Trump has repeatedly said mail-in voting has a high risk of fraud, despite evidence to the contrary, and his campaign is suing New Jersey to block Gov. Phil Murphy's plan to send mail-in ballots to every voter.

The postal service warned New Jersey last month it couldn't guarantee all ballots would be delivered in time to be counted, but DeJoy has since testified that election mail is his "No. 1 priority" and denied accusations of partisan meddling.

That wasn't enough for officials in New Jersey, who said his testimony failed to "explain how he could ensure the timely delivery of election mail given that the agency did not plan to undo these delay-inducing policies."

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court for Washington D.C. along with New York city and state, Hawaii, and the city and county of San Francisco.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.