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2024 OCT 23 PM 01:17

COUNCIL CONSIDERATION REQUEST

TO: Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk

FROM: Councilmember Marina Alderete Gavito, Council District 7

COPIES: Erik Walsh, City Manager; Andy Segovia, City Attorney

SUBJECT: Addressing Cluster Mailbox Theft in the Community

DATE: Wednesday, October 23, 2024

Issue for Proposed Consideration

After coordinating this Council Consideration Request (CCR) with the City Manager, I respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following item on the agenda of the earliest available meeting of the Governance Committee:

Requesting consideration of Addressing Cluster Mailbox Theft in the Community

Brief Background

Mail theft has become a serious issue throughout our city and across the United States, increasing significantly in frequency since 2019¹. People who steal mail are usually looking for checks, cash, or identity information that can be used or sold. Often vandals target community mailboxes, also called “Cluster Box Units (CBUs)” or “Cluster Mailboxes.” CBUs are large boxes that hold mail receptacles for numerous residents, as opposed to single boxes on each individual property. These CBUs are common in newer developments, apartment complexes and other planned communities.

CBUs carry a much larger amount of mail than individual boxes, thus they are more appealing to bad actors. Thieves operate by forcing the boxes open, often leaving them inoperable, or by using a stolen master key called an “arrow key.” These universal keys are used by postal workers to access locked mail receptacles. The National Association of Letter Carriers Alamo Branch 421

¹ United States Postal Inspection Service, 2024. https://www.uspis.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/USPIS-Mail-Theft-Strategy-FINAL-3-13-24_v2-002.pdf



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reports that numerous mail carriers have been robbed at gunpoint for these keys in and around Bexar County. The United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) reported that 605 letter carrier robberies occurred nationwide in FY 2023. From FY 2019 to FY 2023, high volume mail-theft from mail receptacles increased by 139%.²

Recent efforts at the federal level to provide help in replacing CBUs damaged by theft have been rejected by the United States Postal Service (USPS), citing that the applicable Homeowners' Association (HOA) or property management company owns the CBU and is therefore responsible for repair or replacement. As a result, members of HOAs have been significantly impacted by the recent increase in mail theft due to the higher prevalence of CBUs in those communities. Replacing a single broken cluster mailbox can cost around \$2,000-\$3,000. Many communities have multiple boxes, and thieves will often hit each one in a night. This can quickly create an unmanageable cost burden for HOAs and increase frustration for residents.

In addition, local law enforcement agencies face numerous barriers in making arrests or identifying suspects in these crimes. SAPD reports difficulty closing these cases because of lack of investigative leads such as the absence of physical evidence, video footage, fingerprints, witnesses, and suspect vehicle descriptions. Moreover, prosecution of these cases can be difficult. Without the investigative leads mentioned, it is challenging to apprehend suspects.

While Federal entities including USPS and USPIS have laid out a plan, "Project Safe Delivery", aimed at improving investigation of mail theft and safety of letter carriers, there is little effort by these entities to help local residents who are impacted by mail theft. As a result, residents of HOAs report a sense of helplessness after becoming victims of these types of crimes.

Request

1. I request that the City create a program to assist public and private Homeowners' Associations in obtaining and installing All Night Security Lighting around mailboxes in their neighborhood, in partnership with CPS Energy's existing program. This program should also assist with providing other theft-deterrence measures, such as signage and neighborhood theft-prevention mailers.
2. I request the creation of a Mail Theft Task Force composed of local and federal stakeholders to better coordinate and address the issue of cluster mailbox theft in our community. The Task Force will conclude once recommendations have been

² United States Postal Inspection Service, 2024. https://www.uspis.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/USPIS_Mail-Theft-Strategy-FINAL-3-13-24_v2-002.pdf



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implemented and evaluated for effectiveness. The Task Force shall be tasked with, at a minimum:

- a. Identifying areas of inefficiency and creating recommendations for process improvement regarding investigation of Cluster Mailbox Theft.
 - b. Creation of a locally tailored plan and performance measures to address the issue collectively.
 - c. Recommendations for educational and public relations activities to raise awareness about mail theft prevention and legal implications of committing these crimes.
 - d. Provide recommendations on potential updates to the Unified Development Code regarding new residential developments incorporating CBU theft deterrence measures, such as lighting near mailboxes, individual mailboxes or High Security CBUs.
 - e. Provide updates to the Council on what action can be or is being taken at the State and Federal level to tackle this issue.
 - f. Recommendations for prioritization during future Legislative Session Agendas.
3. The Task Force should include, but not be limited to, members of each of the following:
- a. Impacted HOA Communities
 - b. United States Postal Service
 - c. United States Postal Inspection Service
 - d. San Antonio Police Department
 - e. Bexar County Sheriff's Office
 - f. Bexar County District Attorney's Office
 - g. Bexar County Office of Criminal Justice Policy, Planning & Programs



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- h. The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)
- i. Real Estate Council of San Antonio (RECSA)
- j. City of San Antonio Government Affairs Department
- k. The City Attorney's Office
- l. San Antonio Board of Realtors (SABOR)
- m. San Antonio Apartment Association



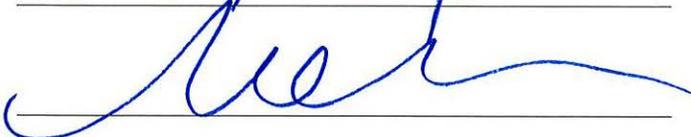
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Submitted for Council consideration by: 
Councilmember Marina Alderete Gavito

Supporting Councilmembers' Signatures (exactly 4)

District

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