

NFL's chaos keeps us watching till end

Column: Don't look away yet. As regular season wraps up, there's still so much at stake. **In Sports**

Shocking murder, shocking twists

Owner of iconic Nashville club was killed in 1998. But is the right man in prison? **In Weekend Extra**



This year's most anticipated books

If you made New Year's resolution to read more in 2026, we'll help kick-start your goals. **In Life**

Postmark rule may result in penalties

Change could affect time-sensitive mail

Sarah D. Wire and Maria Francis
USA TODAY NETWORK

The U.S. Postal Service is making new changes in 2026, including adjustments to the postmark process, which could result in late fees and penalties for anyone mailing time-sensitive documents such as tax returns or bill payments.

For decades, the postmark – an official mark that shows where and when mail was accepted by the Postal Service – has been used in law as proof that an individual met a deadline, such as submitting a ballot by Election Day.

A USPS postmark used to indicate the date when mail was dropped in a mailbox or submitted at the post office counter. Now, USPS is clarifying in a new rule that the postmark will reflect the date an envelope is first processed by an automated USPS sorting machine, potentially days after it was dropped off – not the actual drop-off date.

Changes to USPS are part of its Delivering For America initiative that includes consolidation of mail processing and modernizing infrastructure to fit a time when the volume of paper letters is dropping and the number of packages is increasing.

For a long time, Americans have assumed that mail will be postmarked the day it is mailed and may not be prepared to account for the extra days.

Tax payments, charitable contributions, legal filings, rent payments and other bills or items that rely on postmark dates for deadlines can be impacted by later postmarks and risk late fees, penalties or delinquency.

Many states also accept ballots that are postmarked by Election Day.

Time-sensitive mail should be mailed several days before the deadline.

People can also go inside their local post office and ask for a hand-stamped “manual postmark” on the date, or use certified mail.

When do USPS postal shipping rates go up and by how much?

While the cost of a First-Class Mail stamp, currently 78 cents, is not set to rise at this time, shipping costs for Priority Mail, Priority Mail Express, USPS Ground Advantage and Parcel Select rates are all expected to go up in the new year.

The increase in USPS shipping rates is set to take effect on Jan. 18. Prices are based on the package's weight and the distance it is being shipped.

- Priority Mail prices start at \$10.45 per package and \$11.90 for a flat-rate Priority Mail envelope. They are expected to increase 6.6%.

- Priority Mail Express packages start at \$32.50 and flat-rate envelopes start at \$33.40. They are expected to increase by 5.1%.

- USPS Ground Advantage starts at \$7.20 and is expected to increase by 7.8%.

- Parcel Select is expected to increase by 6%.

The standard First-Class Mail letter

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Suffering of homeless students, families is hiding in the shadows in America's schools



When T'Roya Jackson had to move with her children to a homeless shelter in Washington, DC, she says she cried for two weeks. “But my little guys are really strong soldiers,” she says. “They are what pulled me through.” JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY

‘It’s everywhere’

Christopher Cann USA TODAY

WASHINGTON

After T'Roya Jackson discovered the paint in her apartment gave her daughter lead poisoning, she and her children moved out. ● They couch-surfed for a while before moving into a homeless shelter over the summer. The hair stylist began looking for a rental that would accept her hard-won housing voucher – all while caring for her five children, including a newborn. ● “It’s been extremely difficult,” she told USA TODAY, recounting how she has tried to keep her oldest children – ages 14, 9 and 8 – in school, paying for taxis to take them to class and ensuring they have some quiet study time, a challenge in their cramped one-bedroom unit. ● Jackson and her family are not alone: Nationwide, hundreds of thousands of homeless students are in hotels, doubled up in apartments or living in shelters. Most of them are with at least one parent or guardian, though many are unaccompanied.

The number of students grappling with unstable housing has jumped in recent years, a continuation of a decadeslong trend and a troubling sign that a deepening housing crisis is hurting the country's youngest and most vulnerable people.

In 2025, New York City reported 154,000 homeless students, the most in the city's recorded history. Last year in California, the number of

“This is happening across the United States. We can't just say it's a rural issue or it's an inner-city problem.”

Michael Gottfried
University of Pennsylvania

homeless students rose by nearly 20,000 statewide, a 4% increase from a year earlier and the sharpest rise the state has seen in a decade.

The problem isn't limited to the largest states or cities. Suburban and rural communities in states like Iowa, Indiana and Florida also reported a rise in student homelessness in 2025.

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The young are giving from the heart – not the wallet

Phaedra Trethan USA TODAY

A New Jersey free kitchen has seen an explosion in young volunteers eager to help their community, part of a national trend that is proving surprisingly challenging for charities.

Data shows young adults today are far more inclined to donate their time, but some data points suggest they're not donating their money as readily as earlier generations.

GivingUSA reports that while charitable giving is often tied to age and household income (older generations tend to have more leisure time in retirement and have accumulated more wealth), older and younger people before 2016 volunteered at



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