STATEMENT OF TERI BRISTOL, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, AND RICKIE CANNON, DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, ON AVIATION, ON A REVIEW OF THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION'S AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER HIRING, STAFFING AND TRAINING PLANS, JUNE 15, 2016.

Chairman LoBiondo, Congressman Larsen, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the agency's ongoing efforts to ensure that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continues to provide the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world. The FAA's national airspace system (NAS) is an extremely complex operation. On any given day, FAA's air traffic controllers safely control more than 50,000 flights ranging from small general aviation to large commercial aircraft operations. In addition, the NAS is ever changing and we must be in a position to manage those changes that are occurring in aviation. For example, we are currently integrating new aviation technologies into the NAS, such as unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and the emerging commercial space industry.

Delays in our hiring process, such as what we experienced in 2013 with sequestration, can create ripples across our training and placement process. We want the very best air traffic controllers and these are positions that involve the highest levels of public trust, so medical and security clearances take a considerable amount of time. We have made significant strides in recent months to ensure that our processes and our pipeline of applicants are as efficient as possible. These changes include filling slots at the FAA Academy more efficiently and placing trainees once they leave the Academy at facilities where the FAA needs them most, with preferences

dictated by their class ranking. All of these improvements have resulted in the fact that we are on target to meet or exceed our FY 2016 hiring plan.

Key to our ability to meet both the ongoing and emerging needs of the users of the system is our ability to attract, train and retain individuals who possess certain unique capabilities that translate into becoming proficient air traffic controllers. How best to identify those individuals has been the topic of many studies. We are applying a data driven approach to hiring air traffic controllers which we believe will result in a more accurate prediction of who can succeed at the job. Air traffic control is a highly sought after occupation where we typically have a lot more candidates than we have the capacity to hire.

Today, I would like to focus on four areas; how we hire controllers, how we train controllers, how we place controllers, and how we collaborate with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) to ensure everyone understands what we are doing and why. We think the processes and plans we have in place better target our ideal candidates, train them more effectively, and properly place them at the right facilities that will meet the needs of the NAS as a whole.

Hiring

In 2011, FAA Administrator Babbitt chartered an Independent Review Panel (IRP) that focused on the many facets of controller hiring, selection, training and professional standards. The IRP made 49 recommendations that the agency has been following up on. In 2012, the FAA undertook a comprehensive review of the Air Traffic Control Specialist (ATCS) Centralized Hiring Process as called for by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The

EEOC requires agencies to regularly evaluate their employment practices to identify barriers to equality of opportunity for all individuals. This review identified a number of concerns in the hiring process echoing some of the findings of the IRP. Consequently, in 2013, the FAA undertook a comprehensive analysis of how to improve the ATCS hiring process. This resulted in the development of both short- and long-term recommended improvements and an interim hiring process in 2014. The changes were intended to ensure that the agency selects applicants with the highest probability of successfully completing our rigorous air traffic controller training program and achieving final certification as ATCSs.

The interim process differed from prior agency practice for hiring ATCSs in two primary ways. First, we created a single, nation-wide vacancy announcement for entry-level air traffic controllers, and a single process to evaluate and assess those applicants, resulting in one set of qualifications for all applicants. Second, an applicant had to achieve a passing score on a new component of the hiring process, the Biographical Assessment. Upon passing the Biographical Assessment, applicants were eligible to take the Air Traffic Selection and Training (AT-SAT) exam, which they also had to pass in order to proceed. The goal was to create a national process that did not create different eligibility standards for the same entry-level air traffic controller position. More than fifteen hundred applicants were selected as a result of the interim process that was initiated in February 2014.

While using the interim process, the agency continued to incorporate more long-term recommendations for hiring in 2015 while retaining key features of the interim process. We completed an Occupational Job Task Analysis and Validation, updated the Biographical Assessment and initiated a study to replace the AT-SAT with a validated alternative test. The

agency also focused on hiring experienced ATCS candidates, creating two approaches, or tracks. The general experience/education track (entry-level ATCS) is open to all U.S. citizens who apply in response to a general public vacancy announcement. Our focus for this track is to reach candidates without air traffic experience, who nevertheless have the aptitude for ATCS work, evidenced by passing the position's minimum qualifications, including the Biographical Assessment and AT-SAT. These applicants are hired at the FG-1 (entry) level and attend FAA Academy training. The second track, the specialized ATC experience track, focuses on reaching candidates with operational experience, such as reinstating former FAA Certified Professional Controllers or military veterans with air traffic control experience. This group must have a minimum of 52 weeks of post-certification ATC experience and are hired at a higher pay level than the general experience/education track, reflecting the fact that the FAA will not have to invest the same amount of resources in training these applicants. Because of their specialized experience, this group does not take the biographical assessment or the AT-SAT. In addition, this group reports directly to a facility, rather than the FAA Academy.

We believe these changes will improve efficiencies and have addressed the concerns identified in our initial reviews of the hiring process. This process better addresses the agency's current hiring needs. It also ensures equitable treatment and the broadest pool of qualified candidates. The biographical assessment is a computerized test that measures important and demonstrably job-related personal characteristics of applicants. Replacing AT-SAT with a validated alternative air traffic skills assessment eliminates the possibility that AT-SAT has been over-exposed and is potentially compromised. We will continue to monitor and refine the process as necessary to ensure that the best possible individuals are selected to maintain the safety and efficiency of the NAS.

Controller needs in future years are driving current hiring decisions. The FAA uses a series of models to forecast staffing and develop hiring plans. The FY 2016 controller workforce plan, a plan we provide to Congress annually, reflects expected hiring based on operational needs. It reflects the fact that we hired below plan objectives in FY 2013 through FY 2015 due to the impact of sequestration initially, and then subsequent throughput issues with the hiring process. FAA has hired 4,759 new controllers over the past five years. We are on track to meet or exceed our hiring target for this year, which is 1,619 controllers. As of June 2, 2016, FAA has issued 1,653 firm offers to applicants, of which 1,277 have been hired, and the remaining 376 holding firm offers have a FY 2016 start date. More than 2,000 qualified candidates remain in the hiring pool.

It is important to understand that FAA's retirement forecast, and the other models we use to predict the needs of the NAS, have been extremely accurate. Over the past five years in aggregate, the forecast was 98.7% accurate. Consequently, the improved hiring process, which results in a better selection of candidates most likely to succeed in becoming a certified controller, will better focus the agency's investment in individuals who are the most likely to succeed. We are confident that our new approach, together with recent enhancements, has resulted in greater ability for the FAA to meet staffing goals moving forward.

Training

At the end of FY 2015, the FAA employed 10,947 certified professional controllers (CPC) plus an additional 2,964 personnel in ATC field qualification training for a total of 13, 911. New hires who do not possess previous air traffic control experience attend training at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City where foundational air traffic control knowledge is obtained through

classroom and simulation training. ATCS training at the FAA Academy is basic in nature and is

used to determine whether students can master rudimentary air traffic control skills before

moving on to more advanced, facility-specific training. All new hires who report to the FAA

Academy must successfully complete an air traffic control initial qualification training course in

one of two options; Terminal (tower) or En Route, before graduating to the next phase of training

where they will learn more advanced skills. Each option focuses on different aspects of air

traffic control. FAA identifies an Academy throughput quota for each fiscal year for both

Terminal and En Route options. For FY 2016, the Academy throughput quota for the Terminal

option is 446 and the En Route option quota is 1,044. Pass rates for new hires at the Academy

are approximately 74% for Terminal (tower) training and 68% for En Route. A cumulative

grading system is utilized for all initial qualification training at the FAA Academy. This

progressive grading system includes progress checks for students so they can better understand

how well they are doing in comparison to a well-established standard as well as identifying areas

for improvement throughout this process.

Upon successful completion of Academy training, graduates are assigned to air traffic control

facilities based on FAA needs. At their assigned facilities, they must complete additional

rigorous classroom, simulation, and on-the-job training to achieve final certification as a CPC.

On-the-job training times vary based on the facilities' operational complexity. On average, on-

the-job training takes 1.5 years at a tower, 2 years at terminal radar facilities (TRACON), and up

to 3.5 years at an En Route facility. Even after final certification, all controllers are assigned

periodic proficiency training, such as recurrent, refresher, or supplemental training.

In April 2015, after a full and open competition, a contract award was made to Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) for air traffic controller training. The Controller Training Contract (CTC) incorporates the use of a resource management approach to training. This approach ensures that resources are aligned with national training needs and plans. The FAA developed the training requirements tool (TRT) to document and track all monthly training requirements and expenditures at both the FAA Academy and field facilities. The TRT also serves as a reporting engine used for forecasting future training budget needs. The contract calls for FAA to determine training requirements and to allocate funds for FAA Academy and field facilities based on training needs. We have established processes designed to provide program oversight along with a governance structure which ensures job analysis information and the training curriculum remains aligned and updated.

As with our hiring process, FAA continually strives to improve the training we provide our controllers. The Air Traffic Organization (ATO) supports the air traffic controller basic qualification training working group under the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee (ARAC) structure. Currently, there is an 11-person volunteer panel representing a broad range of academic and industry stakeholders working with FAA experts tasked with evaluating possible alternative visions to national hiring and training.

We are also establishing a center of excellence (COE) for Technical Training and Human Performance. This will enable us to tap into innovation, motivation and technology resources for cost-share research on issues that contribute to safety and training improvements. Research from COE grants could be used to help shape the future of air traffic controller training.

Placement

The FAA national facility placement strategy is focused on having the right controller in the
right place, in the right seat, at the right time. More centralized staffing decisions are the key to
maximizing the agency's resources. The FAA uses its staffing standards to set overall hiring
targets for a NAS-wide workforce, and also collaborates with NATCA on establishing facility-
specific targets that are used for placing and transferring controllers strategically at facilities
across the country.

The FAA uses a priority placement tool to forecast and prioritize controller staffing
requirements. It captures the latest priority ranking of all 315 facilities and is sorted in order of
greatest staffing need. This is based on current staffing, known gain and losses and projected
attrition. Using data from the priority placement model, the FAA centralized the controller
transfer process at the headquarters level in order to best implement a national prioritization
process.

The FAA takes great pride in its safety record. Current Air Traffic Control Specialists acting as
On the Job Instructors are very careful to ensure that individuals who are going through the
certification process truly have what it takes to be successful. We place trainees where they are
most likely to succeed. There are certain facilities that have a higher success rate in certifying
trainees with limited FAA experience. These facilities provide further training before a
controller moves to one of our more complex locations. It is our practice to place Academy
graduates and non-FAA experienced candidates at En Route centers and terminal facilities that
have a proven record of being able to certify trainees with limited Air Traffic Control experience.
These are generally smaller, less busy towers. By placing our trainees in these facilities, it

permits more experienced controllers at those facilities the opportunity to move on to a larger, more complex facility with a higher pay level.

An integral part of the placement process is to support facility-to-facility transfers. To support this, we established a national release policy that identifies facilities that are able to release employees quickly based on two categories. The first category identifies facilities that are staffed above 90% of the facility-specific target for Certified Professional Controllers. These facilities are able to release employees within three months of selection at another facility, or up to six months at the election of the employee. The second category identifies facilities that are above the national average of CPCs. These facilities are able to release employees within one year of selection.

Also critical to the success of facility-to-facility transfers is widely distributing the priority placement tools so controllers looking to take advantage of opportunities available at other facilities are able to anticipate where they can transfer, rather than placing requests for transfers to facilities that are already properly staffed Our efforts have also refined staffing tools that have allowed us to obtain a much more granular understanding of the unique staffing scenarios that occur at individual facilities. Having tools such as temporary assignments out of the bargaining unit and Employee Requested Reassignment (ERR) in place paved the way for establishing a collaborative national centralized ERR placement team or National Centralized ERR Process Team (NCEPT). NATCA is a member of the team to review all requests for reassignment. This collaborative team will ensure the process works as intended, to staff our most challenged facilities with individuals who can transfer and, most important, certify as quickly as possible.

Collaboration

Change is always challenging, even when it is necessary. Our ability to meet the challenge requires collaboration with our labor partners and our colleagues across the FAA. This means building relationships, establishing trust, and working together to make better decisions. First and foremost, we have streamlined our placement process to incorporate best practices from the national priority placement tool, which helps us balance our workforce and allows controllers to rank their top choices from the availabilities on the national list. This reduces the time it takes to facilitate needed transfers and meet the changing needs of the NAS

We established a Collaborative Resource Workgroup with NATCA that is reviewing the staffing models that are in place. That review is underway, and the Workgroup also established facility-specific targets across the facilities that have allowed us to have a common and easy-to-understand placement strategy when it comes to balancing the Air Traffic Controller workforce. Facilities that are above the current CPC average are able to release controllers that are currently below the average.

Conclusion

The FAA has faced hiring and training challenges in the past several years due, in part, to resource constraints and process inefficiencies. We have worked very hard to refine our hiring, training, and placement processes to protect the future of the safety and efficiency of the NAS for its current and future users. We are confident that these continuing efforts have resulted in a sustainable hiring process which will meet our needs this year and in the future. The

improvements to training to ensure proficiency along with smarter placement strategies will ensure that staffing challenges, where they exist, are positively addressed.

We are now strategically placing new hires where we need them. We have collaboratively established CPC facility-specific targets that allow us to balance the workforce by executing staffing to the national average. We are posting this information online to make the information available to our workforce. We have implemented sophisticated automated tools, standardized processes, and a national ERR placement team to facilitate the transfer of experienced controllers. In addition, we have implemented a national release policy to expedite that movement to and from identified facilities.

The FAA has a solid and comprehensive plan in place to address controller hiring, training, and placement. While we are always looking to improve, the air traffic system in the United States is the envy of the world. The complexity of our system does not exist anywhere else. We are open to new ideas and are looking forward to working with our government and industry partners to consider improved ways to approach meeting the air traffic needs of the future.

This concludes my statement. I will be happy to answer your questions at this time.