

Proposals for the *Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization of 2023*
Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher
April 14, 2023

I appreciate the opportunity to testify about priorities for the reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that will support economic growth and airport service in my community, expand and support our aviation workforce, and ensure the safe integration of new airspace technologies.

Economic Growth and Airport Service

The Sugar Land Regional Airport, located in Texas' Seventh Congressional District, is a valued community partner that provides general aviation service, serves as a reliever airport for George Bush Intercontinental Airport and Hobby Airport, and plays an important role in coordinating regional disaster relief and recovery.

It is also one of 262 airports around the country that is able to provide commercial and emergency service because of the FAA Contract Tower Program. This program is crucial to maintaining air traffic services at airports that might otherwise not have control tower staffing. Currently, this program receives funding on an annual basis, creating operational uncertainty for airports like the Sugar Land Regional Airport which relies on this program to carry out its work.

I request that the *FAA Reauthorization of 2023* permit multi-year expenditure authority for this important program. This request will support the aviation needs of communities around the country and propel economic development and investment for their residents.

Aviation Workforce

Although the U.S. airline industry currently employs more workers than it employed before the COVID-19 pandemic, certain aviation workers are struggling to maintain baseline staffing numbers. These staffing problems threaten our domestic industries and jeopardize air safety.

I support the expansion of the Aviation Workforce Development Grant program, an important tool to prepare the next generation of pilots and aviation maintenance technicians. For Fiscal Year 2023, \$10 million in grants will support 23 programs across the country. **I ask the Committee to (1) increase the authorized funding level for this program and (2) expand its eligibility requirements to include rotary-wing aircraft industry.** The rotary-wing industry is experiencing similar staffing issues to the fixed-wing industry, impacting its unique usage in disaster recovery, search and rescue, medical transportation, and law enforcement. In Texas and along the Gulf Coast, rotary-wing aircraft also play important roles in supporting offshore energy production. As we work to secure domestic energy production and expand our offshore energy capabilities to include wind and solar, we will need a reliable talent pipeline for rotary-wing aircraft.

In the last decade, the number of air traffic controllers has dropped ten percent. This shortage threatens the safety of our current aviation system and impacts flight availability around the

country. **I request that the Committee ensure the FAA has the resources to continue their focus on increasing this important workforce.**

New Airspace Technologies

Looking to the future, we must ensure we are investing in the talent pipeline that will support new aviation technologies, including Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). AAM aircraft can support a variety of different services, including regional passenger operations, air cargo deliveries, and public service operations such as police, fire, and medical services. Currently, only former military pilots have access to the training required to pilot an AAM aircraft, limiting the civilian pilot pool to less than 400 nationwide. Without an accessible path for a civilian pilot to obtain the necessary certification to fly AAM aircraft, the American aviation industry will be delayed in adopting these new technologies, including electric AAM aircraft that will reduce emissions and achieve a more sustainable industry. **I request the Committee authorize a clear pathway at the FAA for civilian pilots to obtain a powered lift certificate, including through issuing an FAA Special Federal Aviation Regulation.**

Last, we must ensure that the FAA supports the hard infrastructure that these innovative airspace technologies will require. I am glad last year's government funding bill authorized an AAM planning grant program. As state, local, and tribal governments use these planning grants to prepare for the integration of AAM, **I request the Committee authorize AAM construction funding to make the needed adjustments at existing airports for AAM takeoff and landing, including supporting electric AAM aircraft and their charging needs.**

Authorizing these priorities will support our aviation industry and workforce and prepare the United States for the next generation of air service technologies. Thank you for your consideration of these important requests. I look forward to working with the Committee on these priorities and much more.