

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3902

April 18, 2023

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2164 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony to the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and elevate Rhode Islanders' priorities as you prepare to reauthorize federal aviation programs. The Ocean State's aviation industry generates more than \$2.66 billion in economic output annually and is responsible for producing more than 18,500 jobs. A long-term reauthorization is critical for growing Rhode Island's aviation sector, advancing innovation, improving safety, and benefiting the flying public. I urge you to include the following priorities that will help build a pipeline of new workers, address staffing shortages, improve aviation infrastructure, and help restore trust between passengers and airlines.

Consumer Protection

- **Request:** Include the FAIR Fees Act
 - **Rationale:** Americans can only make informed purchasing decisions and budget appropriately if they can accurately compare airline prices and fees. I applaud the Biden Administration for taking steps to end this exploitative practice, and urge the Committee to codify common sense transparency rules into law, such as requiring airlines and booking services to disclose total costs upfront. I thank Aviation Subcommittee Ranking Member Cohen for his years of advocacy in this space, including his work leading the FAIR Fees Act.
- **Request:** Prohibit Airlines from Charging Families for Requesting to Sit with their Children
 - **Rationale:** As a parent, I find it exploitative that airlines can restrict families from sitting together on flights unless they pay extra, and I consider these policies particularly inequitable when taking into account the hardships faced by families with limited financial resources. It's simple: airlines shouldn't nickel and dime parents just to allow them to sit next to their young children. While the Department of Transportation is attempting to curb these practices administratively, Congress should crack down on these uncalled-for fees once and for all.
- **Request:** Include the Cash Refunds for Flight Cancellations Act
 - **Rationale:** The Biden Administration is making it clear that carriers have a responsibility to provide timely refunds when certain cancellations or significant changes occur to a scheduled flight. Rep. Cohen's Cash Refunds for Flight Cancellations Act would ensure passengers are quickly and fairly compensated for unreasonable cancellations or significant delays within an airline's control.

Accessibility

- **Request:** Pass the Air Carrier Access Amendments Act
 - **Rationale:** We must make air travel more inclusive and equitable for all Americans, including those with disabilities. The Air Carrier Access Act has been the law of the land for 37 years, but passengers with disabilities still struggle to find accommodations at airports or navigate while onboard an aircraft. Moreover, we've seen a concerning uptick in disability-related complaints, with a 54 percent jump in claims in 2021 compared to 2019. The Air Carrier Access Amendments Act, a bill championed by former Rep. Jim Langevin, will help make air travel more accessible for individuals with disabilities and give them and the federal government new tools to penalize bad actors.

Expand the Airport Terminal Program

- **Request:** Allow More Expenses to be Eligible for the Airport Terminal Program
 - **Rationale:** In 1996, the Bruce Sundlun Terminal building opened, allowing for the expansion of several carriers into the Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport (PVD). To safely accommodate the thousands of passengers flying to and from the airport every day, the terminal requires \$25 million in updates. However, limitations under the Airport Terminal Program (ATP) are restricting the airport's operator from making critical improvements, including upgrading the backup power and water systems, expanding seating capacity, renovating the concourse, and modernizing security.

Ensure the Airport Improvement Program Meets Local Needs

- **Request:** Expand Eligible Projects for the Airport Improvement Program
 - **Rationale:** Cargo operations at PVD are largely housed in a decades-old-hanger, and the airport's operator, the Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC), believes a modern facility is needed to provide carriers space for storage, sorting, and other needs. RIAC wants to mitigate light and sound emanating from the area to the greatest extent possible, given that the relocated facility abuts residential properties. Unfortunately, the Federal Aviation Administration's New England Region (FAA-NER) claims that a buffer between the development and the neighborhood is ineligible for funding under the Airport Improvement Program. Similar concerns are emerging at Quonset State Airport (OQU), where an approximately 9,000 linear foot seawall requires immediate repair. The results of a recent seawall inspection show that the northwest and north bulkheads are in critical condition. In order to address resiliency at OQU, RIAC must take several steps to reconstruct the existing seawall. I urge the Committee to ensure Airport Improvement Program funds can cover the full scope of costs for these types of essential projects.

Help the Aviation Sector Address Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities

- **Request:** Provide Funding for Aviation Cybersecurity Compliance
 - **Rationale:** As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, I understand the critical need to insulate our nation's critical infrastructure from cyber threats. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) recognizes the heightened threats against the aviation sector and recently announced plans to require certain entities to develop cyber resiliency plans. Providing a funding structure to support compliance in the aviation sector warrants consideration.

Workforce Development

- **Request:** Support the Aviation WORKS Act
 - **Rationale:** The aviation industry is experiencing a range of labor challenges, from an aging workforce to pilot shortages to gaps in the manufacturing sector. The 2018 FAA Reauthorization created the Aviation Workforce Development Grant Program to grow the

pipeline of pilots and maintenance technical workers. Congress should build on this program's success – an idea central to Ranking Member Larsen's Aviation WORKS Act.

Air Traffic Controller Staffing

- **Request:** Consider New Methodologies for Determining Air Traffic Controller Staffing Needs
 - **Rationale:** Air traffic controllers ensure the safe, timely, and organized arrival and departure of aircrafts. Unfortunately, the FAA employs fewer Certified Professional Controllers (CPCs) than a decade ago. A staffing shortage at one facility reverberates through the entire aviation system: too few crew at the Boston Air Route Traffic Control Center hinders the ability to manage traffic in Providence. The Committee should reconsider whether the FAA's Controller Workforce Plan accurately meets staffing needs or whether to move towards the model offered by the Collaborative Resource Workgroup.

Responding to Weather Disruptions

- **Request:** Study How the Aviation Sector is Responding to Extreme Weather
 - **Rationale:** Since the passage of the 2018 FAA Reauthorization, passengers have experienced a range of travel disruptions caused by snow, ice, high winds, heat, and other conditions that prevented them from visiting loved ones, traveling for business, or taking a vacation. The federal government should study air carriers' preparedness for responding to these weather-related incidents.

Addressing Regulatory Processes

- **Request:** Encourage the FAA and Coast Guard to Ensure the Timely and Safe Certification and Regulation of Wing in Ground Effect (WIG) Vehicles
 - **Rationale:** WIGs, which the FAA interprets as sharing similarities with seaplanes, fly at low altitudes over the water. I'm concerned that regulatory confusion between the FAA and Coast Guard may slow the introduction of new technologies, such as WIGs. I encourage the Committee to find a reasonable solution that promotes cooperation between agencies and facilitates the timely, safe, and responsible introduction of WIGs.

- **Request:** Study Ways to Expand Airline Service to Smaller Communities on Smaller Aircrafts
 - **Rationale:** The standards for aircraft design, construction, and operation must prioritize safety. The FAA should also evaluate those standards and consider ways to allow more kinds of aircrafts to serve smaller communities. I encourage the Committee to have the FAA study regulatory changes that could incentivize aircraft manufacturers to produce planes that fulfill smaller-seat aircraft needs and ensure service to small communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Seth Magaziner
MEMBER OF CONGRESS