

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1309

April 14, 2023

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chair
House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure and Infrastructure

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure and Infrastructure

The Honorable Garret Graves
Chair
Subcommittee on Aviation
House Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee

The Honorable Steve Cohen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation
House Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee

Dear Chairs Graves and Graves, and Ranking Members Larsen and Cohen:

As the Member of Congress representing the 9th Congressional District of Illinois, I am privileged to represent almost twenty municipalities along the north and northwest suburbs of Chicago. Several of these communities lie close to O'Hare International Airport. As a major economic hub, O'Hare sees thousands of aircraft movements daily. Though O'Hare is essential to our community, urge you to end the special regulatory treatment that has shielded airlines from accountability for their harmful treatment of passengers nationwide. in the upcoming Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization. It is high time that we address the disastrous airline deregulation policies that have caused anticompetitive consolidation in the industry, predatory behavior by airlines targeting consumers, and excessive aircraft noise.

Since the passage of the Airline Deregulation Act in 1978, the airline industry has consolidated from more than 20 major airlines into 6 large nationwide carriers. These mergers harm competition, resulting in less choice and higher prices for consumers. Residents of smaller cities have suffered disproportionately, as airlines reduced flights in places like Providence, Memphis, and Cleveland, while also raising prices and hiring less workers, further hurting the economy of these regions.

This past summer and holiday season, countless Americans had their flights delayed or cancelled entirely. Flight cancellations are the highest they have been in more than a decade, and consumer complaints spiked by 375% in October 2022 compared to 2019.¹ In addition to flight cancellations and delays, consumers experience issues with receiving fair refunds, lost luggage that is sometimes irretrievable, accessibility on flights for those with disabilities, and junk fees that separate families.

¹ <https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2023-01/December%202022%20ATCR.pdf>

We must hold airlines accountable for the harm they cause passengers: the missed life events; time separated from loved ones; and the stress of navigating a travel system that is leaving consumers high and dry. It should be unlawful for airlines to sell tickets or delay or cancel flights when the airlines know in advance that they do not have the staff to deliver the promised service. We must also put antitrust enforcers back on the beat by empowering the Federal Trade Commission and state attorneys general to enforce antitrust and consumer protection laws in these markets to end predatory behavior by the airlines. That's exactly what my bill from last Congress with my colleague Rep. Cicilline does, the "Ensuring Friendly Skies for Passengers Act."²

More fundamentally, we must change incentives for airlines. Instead of mergers and share buybacks, the airline industry should have to compete and invest in workers and improvements to passenger experience. Instead of hollowing out capacity, airlines should have to end operational meltdowns, restore stability, and ensure adequate staffing to relieve overworked employees.

The high volume of aircraft activity into and out of O'Hare also has notable negative effects on surrounding communities. Many residents of suburbs including Park Ridge, Mount Prospect, Niles, and others must deal with substantial noise, depending on runway utilization. The noise can impact quality of life – interrupting school days for children, restful sleep, and everyday life events. Absent continued action, the type of problems facing residents in surrounding communities will only get worse.

I am a longtime member of the Quiet Skies Caucus and have been actively advocating for solutions. While significant steps have been taken over the last decades, it is clear that additional work is needed to protect consumers and their quality of life. I regularly receive calls and emails from harmed constituents. For example, Robert from Park Ridge lamented that he and his family cannot open their windows, enjoy their backyard, or have phone conversations due to flight noise. In fact, Robert's noise detector is "registering over 85 decibels" which is over the E.P.A.'s 70-db recommendation. Mary from Chicago shared that at the end of her flight, her power chair mobility aid "arrived in five parts." It is clear that the FAA reauthorization affects all Americans – and it is our duty to serve them.

The FAA's most recent Neighborhood Environmental Survey report demonstrates that the Day-Night Sound Level (DNL) and corresponding Schultz Curve created in the 1970s have outlived their usefulness. The FAA must adapt its noise metrics to ensure accuracy and create regulations and programs that actually address aircraft noise. That includes FAA engagement with community members and groups to gauge aircraft noise impacts and to reduce negative effects on our constituents.

I am thankful for the committee's work on these issues, and I strongly urge you to continue pushing for viable solutions to the consumer protection and noise issues plaguing my

² <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8698/text>

constituents at O'Hare, other major air hubs throughout the nation, and all of the nation's flying public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jan Schakowsky". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress