

**Statement of Icema Gibbs
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JetBlue**

**Subcommittee on Aviation
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Bridging the Gap: Improving Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Aviation Workforce
July 20, 2021**

Opening

- Good morning Chairman Larsen, Ranking Member Graves and members of the Subcommittee on Aviation.
- My name is Icema Gibbs, and I'm Vice President Corporate Social Responsibility and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at JetBlue Airways.
- I am excited to speak today about JetBlue's efforts to improve diversity, our recruiting efforts and how the aviation industry can work together to become more inclusive and equitable.
- As a founding Crewmember of JetBlue, I have been with the airline since the very beginning, before we even had planes.
- This is very personal to me. Over the past 22 years, quite honestly I have often been the only person of color in the room, and many times one of the only women at the table.
- With your help, we have an opportunity to diversify the aviation workforce to better reflect the U.S. population, our customer base and the communities we serve.
- Two parallel paths will help us get there as an industry – (1) increasing representation, and (2) building awareness for aviation careers as early as possible.
- For example, if children see pilots who look like them, then they can dream of becoming a pilot.
- Truth is, aviation is not as well known or as common a career as say law, medicine or education.
- Even small successes with the aviation workforce take time and dedication. After all, it takes a great deal of training to become an airline pilot, and years of training to become an Aircraft Technician, not to mention steep financial commitments.
- One of most proactive ways we can fuel our pipeline is through public-private partnerships and educational initiatives to encourage students to pursue STEM paths as early as possible.
- These programs help expose historically marginalized and underrepresented communities to new career paths and the many possibilities within aviation, early on.

Setting the Stage

- **Women in Aviation** – During the last two decades, the number of women involved in the aviation industry has steadily increased and women can be found in nearly every aviation occupation today. However, the numbers are small by comparison.
- **Women pilots, for example, represent only 8.6% of all pilots, and just 4.6% of commercial airline pilots**, per the [FAA](#). These numbers have not noticeably changed in decades.
- **Black People in Aviation** – Only **3.4% of all aircraft pilots are Black** per the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), even though Black Americans make up [13.4%](#) of the U.S. population.
- **Aircraft Technicians**
 - **5.4%** of aircraft technicians are women, per [Women in Aviation](#)
 - **10.8%** are Black
 - **3.2%** are Asian
 - **23%** are Hispanic or Latinx, per the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- It is clear that these numbers do not align with the overall U.S. population. What's holding our industry back from doing more outreach and trying to be more inclusive? When we don't, by the time many become aware of careers in aviation, it is often too late or financial resources are a barrier.
- At JetBlue, we are starting from within. Our internal programs create access and exposure to well-paying jobs and encourage people from diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds, providing access to higher paying jobs.
- This is one way that we're making these jobs more accessible to a greater talent pool, which will help us shore up our pilot and technician ranks as we potentially face a challenge with supply in the coming years.

Our Hiring Process

- One direct way we are able to affect our pipeline is through our hiring process. Over the past year, as we paused hiring during the pandemic, our Talent Acquisition team used the time to create a new method of interviewing called **BlueSelect**.
- At JetBlue, we have always prioritized hiring new crewmembers who add to our Company's Culture because we know it's our crewmembers who make the difference and deliver the award-winning JetBlue experience to customers every day.
- As we reimagined our diversity, equity and inclusion strategy, we realized we had been using the same interviewing method for decades. While continuing to focus on culture add, we completely rebuilt this process to reduce unconscious biases, and increase diversity in the process.
- We're addressing inequities and helping to correct biases where they exist, starting from within.
- We are tackling diversity recruiting in three specific areas:
 - **focusing on frontline careers such as Pilots and Technicians,**

- **creating upward mobility within our Support Centers (Corporate offices), and**
- **developing a more diverse slate of Officers and Directors**
- Our goal is to create equity for all and reflect the diverse communities and cultures we serve in all aspects of our airline.
- We're prioritizing an investment in our Crewmembers who are already passionate about our business and have a stake in our culture and success.

Leadership Development/Corporate Services Roles

- While we are a diverse organization overall, our frontline crewmember population is quite diverse but that dwindles at each progressive level.
- Our greatest opportunity for improvement is within the Officer and Director ranks where the racial/ethnic composition has remained stagnant.
- Internally, we developed new pathways to help more frontline crewmembers transition from operational to corporate services roles. These more prescribed paths enable a more diverse slate of candidates to be in the talent pool who ideally grow into leadership roles.
- We're creating an inclusive environment where all crewmembers can envision themselves in leadership roles, because they see people that look like them and with shared experiences already in these positions.
- We are holding ourselves accountable to meet our commitments including:
 - Doubling race and ethnic minority representation at the Officer and Director level, from 12.5 percent today to 25 percent by the end of 2025
 - Increasing representation of women at the Officer and Director level, from 32 percent today to 40 percent by the end of 2025.

Our Gateway Pathway Programs

- Our Gateway suite of programs launched in 2008 to help aspiring pilots find their path to JetBlue, and now includes an additional path for internal crewmembers interested in transitioning to careers as Technicians.
- We're building a diverse pipeline within JetBlue to fly and maintain our aircraft. Our programs open up access for both internal and external candidates.
- Our Gateway programs are making careers in our flight decks and hangars accessible to an even broader array of qualified candidates.
- With our internal programs, we are helping to alleviate two common barriers – financing and the risks of leaving a permanent job while in training full-time. We provide a conditional job offer based on successful completion of these programs.
- Our goal is for cost to not to be an obstacle to those selected to join the program.

- **Gateway College** is our newest path and helps to lessen obstacles to certain careers in aviation, and adds a level of certainty to the process. Gateway College provides a defined and accessible career path for crewmembers to transition into Pilot and Technician roles, with the goal of expanding access to a broader internal talent pipeline. Both flight and tech ops programs include a rigorous selection process, training/education with a partner school, and then an opportunity to build time/experience before joining JetBlue as a Pilot or Technician.
- We worked hard to provide some peace of mind by allowing crewmembers to take a leave of absence for part of the program, and offer access to affordable financing options.
- The overall cost for this program will include tuition, training and learning materials. Federal loans, grants and GI Bill funding are available for eligible candidates, and additional funding options will be available to cover any remaining costs of the program.

- **Gateway Select** is our most diverse pathway. This launched in 2017 for external candidates with no flying experience, but who had the aptitude for a career with JetBlue.
- The first class of First Officers to come from the Gateway Select path began with JetBlue in May 2021.
- Gateway Select's training curriculum takes the best from selection programs used by the U.S. military, provides a comprehensive training program, and applies the safety standards and federal requirements for current pilots.
- The program provides participants with the opportunity to become JetBlue pilots after completing a rigorous four-year training program which encompasses classroom learning, extensive real-world flying experience and instruction in full-flight simulators

- Our **University Gateway Pathway** launched in 2008, and is currently the airline's longest-running pathway program for aviation college students. Our partner schools are of the highest quality and have all met specific criteria to be chosen for our program, one element of which is that the program is accredited by the Aviation Accreditation Board International (AABI).

- Our **Tech Ops Apprentice Program** is an opportunity for well-paying jobs for those who have already completed their training and exams to earn the airframe & powerplant (A&P) certificate. In some cases, the program is even available to those right out of high school who have completed this qualification.
- It's a 12-month training program where apprentices gain hands-on experience in our operation and with our various fleets as well as individual training and mentoring.
- Apprentices receive an equivalent of 2-3 years of industry experience, which will truly gear them up for success.
- Upon successful completion, apprentices are promoted to Technicians.

- This speaks directly to our **Partnership with Vocational Schools such as Aviation High School** right in our backyard of Queens, NY. Aviation High School is a direct feeder into JetBlue.
- It combines career and technical education (CTE) training with rigorous academics in a spirited environment. Students have the opportunity to graduate with a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certificate in either airframe or powerplant maintenance in addition to a high school diploma, making them eligible for well-paying jobs, or prepared to move onto college right after high school.
- The caveat, Aviation High School is one of only five high schools across the nation that offer this sort of CTE program.
- This is a direct feeder to our industry’s pipeline. If more of these schools were prevalent throughout the country, this alone would be a significant source for diverse candidates. This model should be replicated.

Fueling the Pipeline as Early as Possible

- We are also investing in the future of our industry and forthcoming recruiting with our company-sponsored Foundation.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected funding for non-profits and education programs.
- The JetBlue Foundation issued a round of rapid response grants to help several STEM and aviation-focused organizations with immediate needs, and support to continue their critical work reaching students, many from underrepresented backgrounds, continue to pursue their STEM paths.
- It’s truly a joint effort, and we already collaborate with two great organizations – the **Latino Pilots Association** and the **Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals**.
 - We provide a special grant to the **Latino Pilots Association**, a non-profit, volunteer organization focused on giving back to the Latinx community, to assist with job placement support and access to financial resources for members who were furloughed due to the pandemic.
 - We also have a long-standing relationship with the **Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals (OBAP)**. Each summer, the JetBlue Foundation helps bring several OBAP Aviation Career Education (ACE) summer programs to life, introducing aviation careers to students ages 14 –18.

Closing

- In closing, inclusion and equity improve retention and increase opportunities for well-rounded candidates.
- JetBlue’s DEI strategy centers on growth, and a more inclusive workplace that drives better decision-making and innovation.
- We are mobilizing our senior leadership team to help us in creating a more equitable workplace. To ensure our success, some metrics will be tied to compensation and goals for JetBlue’s Officers and Directors.”

- Progress in this area may seem slow, but it will take time, dedication and resources.
- As an industry, we must work together now, to fuel tomorrow's pipeline.
- Thank you for the opportunity to share JetBlue's views today. I am happy to answer any questions.