

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2025

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Bedford,

The tragic crash of American Airlines flight 5342 highlighted serious gaps in our aviation safety system and demonstrated the need for a robust and experienced analytical workforce at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Unfortunately, over the past six months, your agency has significantly reduced its workforce. We are deeply concerned about these reductions' impact on aviation safety. We therefore write to request information on changes in the FAA workforce and their impact on aviation safety, including any analyses that the FAA has conducted on the effects of workforce reductions on the agency's safety mission.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation into the crash of American Airlines flight 5342 has demonstrated the need for a robust FAA workforce, beyond the air traffic controllers and other FAA personnel on the front lines of our aviation system. According to the NTSB investigation, more than 15,000 "close proximity events" occurred at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport over the last five years — reflecting a shockingly high trend that the FAA should have identified.¹ At a Senate Commerce Committee hearing in March, the then-Acting FAA Administrator Chris Rocheleau acknowledged that the agency missed this warning sign, in part because of the sheer volume of data that FAA personnel must analyze.² The Acting Administrator's testimony illustrated the need for an FAA workforce robust and experienced enough to analyze all relevant data and identify safety risks. It's critical that this Administration ensures the FAA has the workforce capacity to proactively and properly analyze aviation safety data to prevent another crash like the American Airlines flight 5342 tragedy.

Despite this clear need for enhanced analytical capacity, the FAA has instead moved to reduce its workforce during this critical period. In the aftermath of the crash, the FAA should be analyzing the near miss data from events at Reagan National Airport and reviewing the sufficiency of FAA staffing. Instead, the agency has moved ahead with workforce reductions. In particular, FAA fired hundreds of probationary employees in critical support roles key to assisting air traffic controllers in doing their jobs. With the Department of Transportation (DOT) pushing personnel to leave via two rounds of the Deferred Resignation Program — under which employees could elect to resign and receive pay until September 2025 — coupled with the

¹ National Transportation Safety Board, Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report Accident Number DCA25MA108 (Mar. 11, 2025), <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/Documents/DCA25MA108%20Prelim.pdf>.

² Howard Hardee, 'Clearly, something was missed': FAA administrator flags alarming data before DC collision, Flight Global (Mar. 27, 2025), <https://www.flightglobal.com/safety/clearly-something-was-missed-faa-administrator-flags-alarming-data-before-dc-collision/162385.article>.

federal hiring freeze, federal officials are leaving their jobs and it may be difficult for the FAA to attract new, qualified employees. Although the DOT assured Senators that key FAA safety staff were exempt from firings and the Deferred Resignation Program, the FAA has still not clarified whether it has the staff it needs to ensure the safety of the American public.³ Estimates from the DOT suggest that between 1,000 and 3,000 employees may leave the agency once the Deferred Resignation Program offers are finalized.⁴ According to an internal presentation to FAA management: “Employees are departing the agency in mass quantities across all skill levels.”⁵ Most recently, the Department of Transportation may now be able to move ahead with a large Reduction in Force after the Supreme Court’s recent ruling allowing federal agencies to move forward with staffing cuts consistent with existing federal law.⁶ This moment — after a tragic crash highlighted critical gaps in aviation safety — seems like precisely the wrong time for the FAA to aggressively shrink its workforce.

Moreover, the FAA’s recent announcement that it is using artificial intelligence (AI) to analyze its data — without explaining whether such AI tools are reliable or effective — provides little reassurance to the public. While we support the use of technology to improve how aviation safety data is used, the decision to rely on technological fixes while simultaneously moving ahead with staffing reductions is deeply worrisome. The FAA has not been transparent with Congress about the types of technology it is now using, whether those technologies are replacing, augmenting, or otherwise impacting the FAA workforce, or whether it requires human review of AI analyses before using any analysis in a safety-related decision. This reliance on technological fixes — without a transparent analysis of the FAA’s workforce levels and capacity— raises questions about the FAA’s commitment to prioritizing safety.

If the FAA lacks the staff to identify safety risks before future incidents occur, Congress must be informed of this as soon as possible. At a recent Senate Commerce Committee hearing, Senators questioned FAA officials from the Office of Airports, the Office of Aviation Safety, and the Air Traffic Organization about the personnel reductions at their respective offices and whether their offices had conducted any analysis on the impact of these workforce cuts on aviation safety. Only the head of the FAA Office of Airports — which is charged with planning and developing a safe and efficient national airport system — responded that his Office had conducted such an analysis.⁷ Senators urged the FAA to turn over that analysis to the Committee,

³ Dr. Anne Byrd, Response Letter to Senator Ed Markey, United States Department of Transportation (April 1, 2025).

⁴ Eric Katz, *The Trump administration is staffing up parts of FAA, it’s also incentivizing thousands of departures and threatening layoffs*, Government Executive (May 15, 2025), <https://www.govexec.com/management/2025/05/trump-administration-staffing-parts-faa-its-also-incentivizing-thousands-departures-and-threatening-layoffs/405347/>.

⁵ Andrew Tangel, *Exodus of Staff Adds to FAA’s Challenges*, Wall St. J. (May 29, 2025), <https://www.wsj.com/business/airlines/faa-staff-shortages-challenge-c79805f2>.

⁶ Josh Gerstein and Hassan Ali Kanu, *Supreme court green-lights Trump’s order for mass firings across federal government*, Politico (July 8, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/08/supreme-court-federal-worker-firings-ruling-00442721>.

⁷ Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Hearing, FAA Reauthorization One Year Later: Aviation Safety, Air Traffic, and Next Generation Technology (May 14, 2025), https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2025/5/faa-reauthorization-one-year-later-aviation-safety-air-traffic-and-next-generation-technology_2.

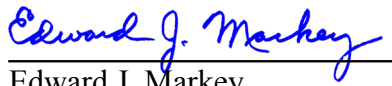
along with data on any workforce reductions, but to date it has not. It is essential that Congress have sufficient information to understand the impact of recent FAA personnel changes on aviation safety.

To better understand the impact of FAA workforce reductions on aviation safety, please provide written responses to the following questions and requests for information by August 11, 2025:

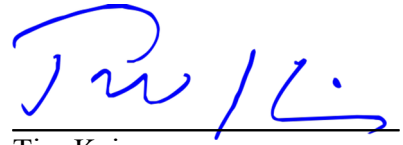
1. For each FAA line of business and its relevant suboffices, please provide the (a) number of employees employed as of January 1, 2025, (b) number of employees employed as of July 1, 2025, and (c) the current number of job openings.
2. For each FAA line of business and its relevant suboffices, please indicate whether any of its job positions are currently subject to a hiring freeze as of January 20, 2025.
3. Please provide the analysis conducted by the Office of Airports related to the impact of workforce cuts on its safety mission.
4. Besides the Office of Airports, please explain if any other FAA line of business has conducted an analysis of the impact of workforce cuts on its ability to deliver its mission. If so, please provide those analyses.
5. Please explain all relevant FAA lines of business and relevant suboffices charged with identifying aviation safety trends and possible safety risks affecting airport operations in congested airspace.
6. What specific AI tools is the FAA using to analyze aviation safety impacts and flight data and how is this improving FAA's analysis?
 - a. Does the FAA have adequate staff, familiar with these tools, to manage this analysis and ensure the security of the data used and generated by AI?
 - b. How were these AI tools selected? Please describe the specific testing or evaluation conducted in advance of the implementation of the tools and provide a copy of any reports or conclusions produced. If no testing or evaluation occurred, please explain why not.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



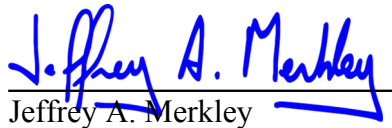
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



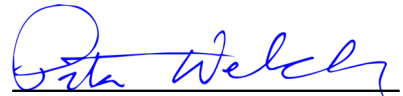
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



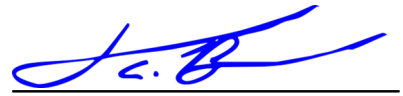
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



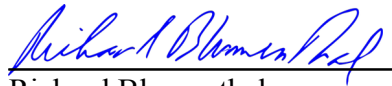
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator