

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable Stephen M. Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson:

We are writing to express our concern that the FAA is considering closing the Air Traffic Control Tower at Richmond International Airport between the hours of midnight and 5:00 a.m. With passenger airlines and cargo aircraft taking off and landing at the Richmond Airport and maintenance crews and other workers having to be on, or crossing over, the airfield during these hours, the need to ensure safety requires that the Control Tower continue to be operational on a 24/7 basis.

On October 1, the FAA's Safety Risk Management Panel hosted a virtual meeting with Richmond Airport officials and various stakeholders. We understand that the FAA's proposal has been met with strong opposition from the Richmond Airport, passenger airlines, cargo carriers, the fixed base operators, the air traffic controllers at the Airport, and other stakeholders.

The FAA's analysis should take into account the critical need for the Control Tower to be open at a busy commercial service airport like Richmond International Airport. For example, airlines often have flights that are scheduled to arrive before midnight but are delayed and land later. The Richmond Airport is also an alternate site when airlines must divert flights from landing at other airports due to weather conditions. The Control Tower also plays an important role in coordinating early morning flights. Although the flights might take off after 5:00 a.m., coordination between the pilots and the Control Tower may begin before 5:00 a.m. and, consequently, the Control Tower needs to be available.

We also urge the FAA to consider the Control Tower's critical role in directing ground traffic at an airport such as the Richmond International Airport, where airfield maintenance and aircraft re-positioning often occur between midnight and 5:00 a.m.

In summary, given the above concerns, we urge the FAA to reconsider the proposed closure of the Control Tower between midnight and 5:00 a.m. We also request a briefing on this matter before any further action is taken.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
U.S. Senator



Tim Kaine
U.S. Senator