

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 3, 2015

The Honorable Anthony Foxx
Secretary
Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Foxx,

We write to express our concerns regarding your comments at a recent hearing of the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, regarding the Department of Transportation's Essential Air Service (EAS) Fiscal Year 2016 request.

In response to a request to explain the Department's request to increase funding for EAS, you stated in part that "...there are more restrictive flight and duty time regulations and increased training requirements for first officers that went into effect January 2014. Those changes have led to a significant shortage in pilots..."

As you know, following a series of tragic aviation accidents, the most recent of which was the crash of Colgan Air Flight 3407 in Western New York in 2009, Congress enacted sweeping aviation safety reforms designed to achieve One Level of Safety for the flying public. The legislation focused on needed reforms, many of which had been recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board, including science based flight and duty regulations as well as updated pilot training and qualification standards. Unfortunately, some regional airlines and have argued against some of these safety improvements legislated by congress, especially the pilot training and qualification regulations, incorrectly claiming they have created a pilot shortage.

We reject this assertion and note that a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on pilot supply and demand issues found that a sufficient pool of trained pilots exist, and identified the meager compensation for newly-hired first officers as a reason that these airlines may have difficulty attracting qualified applicants. The same report found there were 109,465 pilots with an Airline Transport Pilot license, while only 66,000 such jobs existed in 2012.

We are afraid your comments could lend credibility to the myth that a pilot shortage exists due to regulations such as the pilot training and qualification rules, and not due to the inadequate wages, which are often as little as \$14,000 to \$20,000 annually. In fact, the first officer on Flight 3407 earned about \$16,000 a year. The public was rightly outraged to learn that airlines consider this acceptable pay for the professionals we trust with our safety.

As Congress prepares to undertake legislation to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration, please know that we will steadfastly oppose any attempts to roll back these hard won reforms. Further, we ask that you reconsider your position that these regulations have led to a shortage of qualified pilots, which we believe to be made in error. This is a dangerous position which could undercut significant improvements in aviation safety.

We know you share our commitment to the safety of the travelling public and look forward to working with you on these and other issues of aviation safety in the future. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress



Chris Collins
Member of Congress

Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress