

**United States House of Representatives
House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure:
Subcommittee on Aviation**

Hearing on:

**“FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024: Stakeholder Perspectives on
Implementation One Year Later.”**

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Testimony of

Sara Nelson

International President

Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO

Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO
501 Third Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001
Government Affairs Director Stephen Schembs, 202-434-0568

Chair Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and members of the Subcommittee, we are grateful for the opportunity to testify with the perspective of aviation's first responders and our sister unions representing other aviation workers.

The safety and efficiency of our nation's Air Traffic Control (ATC) system are vitally important to Flight Attendants. We count on the highly trained experts who guide our flights through safe departure, cruise altitude, and landing. As aviation's first responders, we are charged with the safety, health, and security of all passengers and crew on our flight and we promise our own families that we will come home safely, too. Aviation safety is personal to us, just as it is for tens of thousands of federal workers who take part in helping us keep the promise to our families and loved ones in our care.

Aviation safety is the product of hundreds of thousands of workers - from engineers to mechanics to safety inspectors, security officers, pilots, gate agents, baggage handlers, flight attendants, and air traffic controllers - asking all day long, "Is it safe?" We ask this question with the information we have from tragic moments of gaps in safety and promises to the memory of those we've lost, and the families with whom we grieve, that it will never happen again. This starts with supporting a thorough investigation, continues with advocacy for reform, and lives forever in our repeated analysis all day long - "Is it safe?"

Aviation is the safest mode of transportation because we demand it, and we built a system that allows us to predict risk, produce redundancies, and fill holes to keep tragedy at bay. The FAA holds the statutory mandate to ensure the highest degree of aviation safety. We support the efforts of the House Aviation Subcommittee to provide critical oversight and demand for implementation of plans to recruit, train, and staff while modernizing and rebuilding the infrastructure necessary to fully staff and resource the experts on the frontlines who guide our planes safely. Earlier this year, our union signed a letter with groups representing the entire aviation industry stating, "we are aligned on not pursuing privatization of U.S. air traffic control services and believe it would be a distraction from these needed investments and reforms."

As safety professionals our training teaches that the first rule in safety is to remove all distractions

Our industry has been through many ups and downs. We cannot control the weather, but we can commit to steady funding, no shutdowns, the highest standards, broad recruitment including: the promise of good, steady jobs, and working with the people on the frontlines who know the system best, how to fix it, what it lacks, and what it needs. The voices of the professionals represented by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) and the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (PASS) are critically important to plan and properly implement modernization, recruitment, and training. Listen to them and engage them consistently.

Aviation is safe due to the work of those you see on the frontlines and every person doing work in support of those jobs. FAA specialists are responsible for repairing air traffic control facilities and updating digital maps for pilots. Meteorologists provide critical reports that help navigate safe flights and avoid the dangers of turbulence that range in harm from air sickness and coffee burns to serious injury and even death. Recent layoffs and firings within our federal workforce introduce unnecessary risk and stress that distract from the mission of ensuring safe flight for both civil and military operations. Chaotic workplaces harm recruitment, training, and retention of critical personnel. The 35-day government shutdown of 2019 and all the short-term funding

bills or continued resolutions harmed staffing, recruitment, training, retention, facility maintenance, and modernization. Do everything in your power to avoid these disruptions and distractions going forward.

We applaud and support this Subcommittee's focus on the safest, most efficient National Airspace System in the world. Safety and security don't just happen. It is the product of our collective mission to make it happen. We encourage you to continue to look to the experts on the frontlines, promote sufficient and steady funding to staff, maintain, and modernize our workplace. The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA is committed to fulfilling this mission with you and all our partners in aviation safety, health, and security.

An Update on the Priorities of our Union in the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024

Sec. 321 Turbulence Related Injuries

By 2026, the FAA is instructed to review the recommendations by the NTSB to enact, as appropriate, these recommendations. Turbulence is a serious workplace safety threat for Flight Attendants with severe and long-term injuries. We do not have a status report on the progress of this instruction from Congress, and we urge this Committee to press the FAA to take action on this serious safety issue.

Sec. 322. Radiation Exposure

The bill directs the Secretary to work with the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study on radiation exposure to crewmembers on board aircraft types across commercial aviation. While crews are classified as radiation workers, we are not offered any education or pregnancy protections. A Harvard Flight Attendant Health Study¹ has already indicated radiation contributes to a broad range of health impacts, including fertility and viability of pregnancies. There are examples from other countries where education and alerts are regulated, especially as it relates to pregnancy. We do not have any evidence of action on this section of the law, but we would welcome the NAS study into suitable radiation protections.

Sec. 323. Study on Impacts of Temperature In Aircraft Cabins

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has begun its mandated "1-year study on the health and safety impacts of unsafe cabin temperature with respect to passengers and crewmembers during each season in which the study is conducted." The kickoff meeting has been conducted, and the study findings are expected by May 2026, including "a short consensus report with its findings and conclusions, and, as appropriate, recommendations to inform strategies for monitoring, assessing, and managing passenger cabin air temperature levels and any associated health and safety impacts." This is progress in terms of implementing the direction of Congress, but our union continues to encourage regulators, airlines, airports, and unions to work together to implement temperature standards in order to mitigate the potential for serious risk to passengers and crew.

Sec. 350 Secondary Cockpit Barriers

This issue is a longtime priority of our union. AFA is serving on the rulemaking committee, and a final report from the committee is expected to be issued to the FAA this month.

Sec. 353 Ramp Safety Language

The FAA Reauthorization of 2024 includes a Call-to-Action safety review of ramp worker safety, which requires the FAA to assess safety on the ramp and report to Congress on results and any

¹ <https://www.fahealth.org/>

recommendations for action. As a crucial first step, the FAA recently convened an aviation stakeholder forum, the Ramp Safety Forum, to foster collaboration and enhance safety practices within the industry.

While this initial convening was positive, ongoing engagement and more substantive action are necessary, particularly with labor representatives and frontline workers. Significant training challenges persist for ramp workers, including: insufficient investment in training, high turnover, rapid onboarding, and redundant and ineffective recurrent training.

Moving forward, the FAA must proactively address the inherent hazards faced by ramp workers and continue to convene diverse stakeholders for further dialogue and action. Key areas for immediate attention include:

- Reassess staffing: One critical role per tower agent
- Conduct risk assessment on multitasking in tower operations
- Review ramp task scheduling for realistic task times
- Avoid overlapping assignments and rushed transitions
- Provide more extensive training for allocators
- Balance safety and efficiency through collaboration with safety teams and management

Sec. 362 Cabin Air Safety

This section of the law requires the FAA to finish the study in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act on bleed air in six months, develop a reporting system for smoke or fume events onboard commercial aircraft within 180 days, and by 2027, conduct a study and issue recommendations pertaining to cabin air quality and any risk of, and potential for, persistent and accidental fume or smoke events onboard a passenger-carrying aircraft operating. Finally, the law instructs the FAA to do a rulemaking one year after the study to address the safety risks identified.

The urgency of moving forward on this language cannot be understated, and to date, we have not seen movement on this issue. The safety risks are already well defined. Crews and passengers continue to experience the effects of contaminated bleed air with symptoms that range from fatigue, headaches, and nausea to long-term cognitive impacts that have ended careers and permanently altered health and quality of life. We look forward to working with members of Congress and this Subcommittee, who also are exposed to re-circulated cabin air when commuting to work, to ensure the air we breathe is safe.

Sec. 365 Modernization and Improvements to Aircraft Evacuation

Our aircraft cabins have become tighter than ever with smaller and closer seats, reduced staffing, and new complications including electronics, cords, and lithium-ion batteries. Currently, the standards for certification of aircraft configuration are determined based on out-of-date data. The Administrator was directed to conduct a study on “improvements to the safety and efficiency of evacuation standards for manufacturers and carriers.” We expect the report from the National Academy of Sciences soon. But we encourage this Subcommittee to do more on this issue and urge the FAA to update certification standards for safe evacuation of all of the variety of people who fly on our planes.

Sec. 367 Mandated contents of Emergency Medical Kit (EMK)

This section directed the FAA to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking to update the EMK contents and training necessary for crews. A working group started to address this issue, but DOGE disbanded it. As aviation’s first responders, charged with the safety, health, and security

of those in our care, we cannot overstate how concerning this is. Without the proper tools to save lives in the air, passengers and crew are at risk due to the time it takes to safely get to ground for medical response. We urge this Subcommittee to follow up on this and ensure DOGE is not in the name of “efficiency” undermining safety.

Sec. 395 Aviation Cybersecurity

Not later than one year after passage of the bill, the Administrator shall convene an aviation rulemaking committee on civil aircraft cybersecurity. We do not have an update on the status of this rulemaking, nor actions to begin efforts on this section of the law. Our union emphasizes the importance of identifying potential threats and establishing standards to mitigate them.

Sec. 421 Crewmember Pumping Guidance

Workers across the economy have the right to express milk at work with the means and privacy to do so. Crewmembers, Flight Attendants, and Pilots do not have the same assurances. Clear guidelines are necessary to ensure safety of flight and proper crew coordination. The FAA has [issued guidance](#),² but it does not provide guidance for crews working in the cabin, with the exception that “pumping crewmembers can use cloth nursing covers to maintain some privacy and that ‘wearable technology’ exists.” This does nothing to address the crew coordination, privacy, health insurance coverage for “wearable technology,” or suggested location for pumping. We are concerned this does not address the concerns related to the health of the infant or crewmember.

Sec. 427 Crewmember Self-Defense Training

Since September 11, 2001, the importance of crew member self-defense training has been identified as critical for national security, and the need for these trained skills has only become more acute as crews have experienced violent attacks from disruptive passengers. The Federal Air Marshals conduct a voluntary program, with authorization and funding appropriated by Congress. The 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act included instructions to create clear standards for the training and more readily available and accessible to crew members, including lodging accommodations which removes an economic barrier to attending the training. However, this administration disbanded multiple federal advisory committees, including the ASAC. The participants included stakeholders from across the industry with three decades of experience in safety and security advisory by seasoned participants. This is just one small example of the security work not taking place due to the dismantling of this committee. And it may be one small example, but it is no small thing to aviation’s first responders who have experienced broken limbs, knocked out teeth, head trauma, and persistent threats with nowhere to turn in our confined workspace. DHS is now evaluating whether to form a new ASAC committee, and we urge this Subcommittee to press DHS for swift reinstatement with representation from stakeholders across aviation, as was the case for more than three decades.

Sec. 432 Detering Crewmember Interference

The law called for the Administrator to convene a task force within 120 days “to develop voluntary standards and best practices relating to suspected violations of the law against interfering with a crew member.” After the bill’s passage, the FAA Administrator determined that it would be best to conduct this work through the TSA Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC). The TSA Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) had been tasked to work on this issue, but again, this administration disbanded the committee. In the meantime, this section

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https://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/airline_operators/airline_safety/info/all_infos/InFO25001.pdf

of the law remains in limbo as well.

Sec. 434 and 435 Employee Assault Prevention and Response Plan Standards

Within 90 days, the FAA was directed to provide a briefing to Congress on the submission of practices by each carrier. Within 180 days, passenger carriers are directed to work with labor unions representing frontline personnel on a formal policy with respect to sexual assault or harassment incidents. It is unclear whether there has been any progress on this direction from Congress.

Sec. 438 Airport Service Workforce Analysis - GJGA Language

Airport service workers are the foundation of our air travel system. The very people who keep our world moving are, too often, the very same workers who are denied a decent wage and benefits like paid time off or affordable healthcare, leaving them unable to support their families or pay the bills. Because of these conditions, turnover remains a huge concern in this workforce. That's why across labor, we support standards like the previously introduced "Good Jobs for Good Airports" legislation, which would ensure every aviation worker is paid a fair wage with health care and paid time off, including airport service workers. These standards result in lower turnover and more highly trained aviation workers, which in turn make airports safer for everyone.

ATC Infrastructure and Staffing Warnings at Newark Were Overdue

A month ago, stories broke about the failure of equipment at Philly TRACON, significantly affecting commercial travel at Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR). These failures immediately sparked public concern about aviation safety at Newark, as passengers and crews experienced significant delays and cancellations. Our union released the following statement on May 2, 2025:

*"This afternoon a story broke about safety concerns related to the air traffic at Newark. NATCA, the air traffic controllers' union, has warned for decades that infrastructure must be rebuilt and modernized. **Our air traffic controllers are the best in the world and they are making sure aviation stays safe.** We support every effort to secure the funding necessary to staff up and provide the resources that are a decade overdue for our air traffic controllers to be able to do their jobs. We call on all airlines operating out of Newark to cut planned flights at an equal percentage across airlines in order to support this work, aviation safety, and our jobs. Working together we can solve the problem faster and keep everyone safe."*

It is worth noting that our air traffic controllers also manage Teterboro Airport (TEB), Morristown Municipal Airport (MMU), Essex County Airport (CDW), Linden Airport (LDJ), which should be part of the conversation about capacity controls while Secretary Duffy works with all constituencies on short term and long term plans to fix and modernize equipment and infrastructure, and support the actions necessary to increase to staffing.

Help Stop Harmful Cuts and Distractions from Safety

DOGE Cuts Put Accurate Weather Forecasts at Risk

The National Weather Service (NWS) oversees a network of offices that provide forecasts, advisories, and warnings in support of aviation safety across the United States and its territories. Weather Forecast Offices, with 122 locations across the US, issue public warnings for things like thunderstorms and provide the Terminal Aerodrome Forecast (TAF) for airports.

These reports forecast meteorological conditions within a 5-mile radius of an airport over a 24- to 30-hour timeframe. These takeoff and landing condition forecasts are essential for safety because they predict low clouds, visibility, wind, low-level wind shear, and weather. This information is essential to set appropriate fuel levels, create flight plans, and mitigate takeoff and landing risks. Additionally, the Aviation Weather Center in Kansas City issues ICAO products across the US for en-route forecasts. This helps pilots and air traffic controllers mitigate turbulence, icing, and storms that aircraft may encounter. NWS meteorologists are co-located at the Air Traffic Control System Command Center (ATCSCC) and 21 Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC) across the country. They notify the FAA of hazards that may impact flights in the ARTCC airspace or on the ground. When conditions are dangerous, they can even work side by side with a controller to tell them when it's safe to move traffic around hazards like thunderstorms. These positions are supposed to be staffed 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, but cutbacks and firings led by Elon Musk and DOGE have created major staffing problems across the system.

Drastic cuts and hiring freezes at NWS threaten aviation safety. In the last few months, 600 workers were let go or took early retirements – that's 12 percent of NWS staff. These sudden and draconian cutbacks undermine the accuracy of forecasts and the agency's ability to share this essential information to the American public. The NWS Center Weather Service Unit in Oakland, California is now down to one meteorologist rather than the four that are needed to fully staff the facility, and the Trump Administration's hiring freeze means they can't bring on new staff to fix the problem. At the System Command Center in Warrenton, Virginia, there is one meteorologist vacancy out of a six-person staff. The NWS Alaska Center Weather Service Unit is down to three Weather Service staff, which puts significant pressure across a state where general aviation is extremely important to daily travel by residents and tourists alike. The NWS Boston Center Weather Service Unit has lost a manager and a meteorologist, leaving two meteorologists to staff the facility 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. To its credit, the NWS has developed temporary workarounds, including having nearby Center Weather Service Unit staff support shorthanded facilities. Still, these are just short-term patches that do not offer a reliable solution for the industry.

I urge members of this Subcommittee to identify where there are open positions in the aviation system. Are the ARTCCs and the System Command Center all fully staffed by NWS staff? What's the status of NWS hiring for these positions? We need to be fully briefed on whether airline workers are getting the essential weather information they need. And it's also time to lift the draconian hiring freeze so that NWS can ensure that flight crews and passengers are protected by the most up-to-date and accurate forecasts possible.

Cuts to Public and Occupational Health Infrastructure Here and Abroad Put Flight Attendants and Other Critical Workers at Risk

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

The AFA is gravely concerned about the degradation of our nation's public health infrastructure resulting from the Administration's cost-cutting efforts. The Administration's attempt to effectively eliminate the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) devalues our nation's workers. These cuts put the health and safety of flight attendants and other essential workers at risk.

And why must these workers bear this risk? To pay for more tax cuts for the ultra-rich. This shift away from the needs of working people to benefit the few is unconscionable. It is tearing at the social fabric of our country and must stop.

Here is a sample of some of the programs that have been eliminated or effectively gutted through staffing cuts:

- NIOSH's Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE) program gives employers and workers an opportunity to request technical assistance to investigate and understand complex health hazards in the workplace. NIOSH and this program have helped Flight Attendants by detecting toxic chemicals in uniforms and evaluating hazards like noise levels and jet fumes in aircraft cabins. NIOSH has studied prolonged radiation exposure to flight crews and assisted the industry in addressing ergonomic issues. The HHE program relies on world-class subject matter experts and testing facilities that can address a range of issues. Most of these experts and facilities currently sit idle.
- The Administration is eliminating NIOSH programs that have provided the airline industry with critical guidance on preventing the spread of infectious disease, including pathogens like the measles that present a public health risk, as well as chemical and heat hazards.
- Flight Attendants, who have above-average injury rates, benefit from NIOSH's Musculoskeletal Health Program, which helps the industry reduce soft-tissue injuries. The Center for Work and Fatigue Research has helped our union better understand and address health and safety risks from non-standard work schedules common in the airline industry. These programs are no longer staffed.
- This Administration has also abandoned programs of applied science that have demonstrably improved the lives of workers in high-hazard industries such as farming, commercial fishing, and oil and gas extraction. These programs must be reinstated.
- The country will also lose its pipeline of future occupational health experts if the Administration proceeds with the elimination of NIOSH's 18 Education and Research Centers, which train graduate and post-graduate students and conduct critical research and occupational health and safety. Recent areas of research include safety during hurricane recovery, oil spill cleanup, and protecting healthcare workers during outbreaks like Ebola and influenza.

There are some programs that have been partially reinstated under public pressure, but their future remains unclear:

- NIOSH administers the Firefighters Cancer Registry. It was shocking to hear that the Administration would no longer collect health and occupational information to help us understand cancer risks among firefighters, especially at a time when firefighter response to wildland and wildland-urban interface fires is at an all-time high.
- Coal miners rely on NIOSH research and their extensive surveillance programs to support miners' health. While some of the staff doing this critical work has been recalled to work, the future of some of this work is also unclear. We owe it to the nation's miners to fully ensure their health and safety through continued research by NIOSH to improve the lives of both retired and working miners.

- Another program with an unclear future is the World Trade Center Program, monitoring and addressing occupational diseases of first responders and construction workers who were at Ground Zero, supporting our nation's recovery from the attacks on 9/11. The Administration needs to be transparent with the country in assuring that the work we owe these heroes will continue.

USAID

The health and safety risks to Flight Attendants are not limited to our borders. A substantial number of AFA's members work internationally. Working with public health agencies, airlines are one of the first lines of defense in this country in ensuring the containment of highly contagious pathogens carried by international travelers.

However, with the Administration's decision to effectively eliminate the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), nations throughout the world are losing the capacity for³ basic public health functions like health surveillance programs, early detection and containment of infectious disease like Ebola, and even basic public health prevention like vaccination programs and elimination of waterborne illnesses.

This is a tragedy for the world. By one estimate from researchers at Boston University School of Public Health, these cuts have already resulted in over 99,000 adult deaths and over 200,000 child deaths globally. In addition to mourning this loss of life, we are deeply concerned that our nation will be repaid for the shortsightedness of eliminating these programs with more and more incidents of dangerous diseases on our aircraft, in our airports, and eventually in our communities. It is simply a matter of time before we feel the implications of this tragic mistake.

In eliminating USAID, the Administration has eliminated⁴:

- A 50-nation network of surveillance to detect deadly diseases such as bird flu and swine fever
- An emergency response system that could respond to deadly disease outbreaks in 48 hours
- Programs that reduced or controlled infections from tuberculosis and measles, both of which are now more likely to enter our country through airports of entry.

Fighting Ebola, or measles, or Mpox overseas is not only a moral responsibility, but also a strategic, smart approach that benefits Americans by reducing the risk of future deadly outbreaks and pandemics here at home. On behalf of more than 50,000 AFA Flight Attendants, I urge Congress and the Administration to act immediately to restore funding and staffing to NIOSH and USAID, in particular its critical life-saving and public health programs.

³ <https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2025/tracking-anticipated-deaths-from-usaid-funding-cuts/>; https://www.impactcounter.com/dashboard?view=table&sort=interval_minutes&order=asc

⁴ Testimony of Dr. Atul Gawande, former Assistant Administrator of Global Health, USAID, Senate Roundtable on the Dangerous Consequences of Funding Cuts to U.S. Global Health Programs (April 1, 2025).

Stop Staffing Cuts and Threats to Federal Worker Benefits

The WSJ published [an article](#) recently that highlights an FAA presentation expressing concern over staff departures that could affect “the processing of medical clearances for pilots and air-traffic controllers, work on runway safety, and the pace of licensing in the agency’s commercial-space offices.”⁵ Every worker at the FAA contributes to safety, whether deemed “essential” or not. The staffing cuts, disruptions, and distractions to the safety work of those who maintain and enforce the standards of our aviation system is simply unacceptable. We know this Subcommittee is committed to safety and a thriving aviation industry. We applaud the passage of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act, and encourage the effort that went into passage to flow directly to the efforts that are necessary today to keep our aviation system the safest in the world.

Closing

It is an honor to work with each of you, to have you fly with us in our workplace, to protect the system that serves as the backbone of our economy, and to work with the urgency necessary to honor the lives lost like those on PSA Flight 5342. It is in their name, and the names of those we will keep from saying by our diligent actions together, that we recommit ourselves to aviation safety every day. Thank you.

⁵ <https://www.wsj.com/business/airlines/faa-staff-shortages-challenge>, Andrew Tangel, May 28, 2025