

**United States House of Representatives
Transportation and Infrastructure
Aviation Subcommittee Hearing
Wednesday, July 17, 2019**

**The Honorable Rick Larsen (D-WA) Chairing
State of Aviation Safety**



**Testimony of
Lori Bassani**

**National President
Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA)**

Association of Professional Flight Attendants
1004 West Eules Boulevard, Eules, Texas 76040
Government Affairs Representative Allie Malis 703-307-3488

Good morning Chairman DeFazio, Chairman Larsen, Ranking Member Graves and members of the Aviation Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify. My name is Lori Bassani. I am the National President of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA). APFA represents the more than 28,000 Flight Attendants of American Airlines and is the largest independent Flight Attendant union in the world. APFA is also a member of the Coalition of Flight Attendant Unions where the multiple labor organizations that represent virtually all US-based Flight Attendants work together to promote aviation safety and this profession. I am honored to be here speaking on behalf of our profession.

The issues that matter to Flight Attendants are the same ones that matter to passengers. I know many of you on this Committee travel each week and personally understand the many challenges of air travel today. While we represent more than 28,000 Flight Attendants, what we are fighting for is a safe and comfortable travel experience for all our passengers. As both first responders on board the aircraft *and* the last line of defense should the unthinkable happen again, safety and security are our top priority.

FAA Oversight

We were gratified when the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act passed by this Committee, was signed into law in October and we applaud that it was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support—an increasingly rare occurrence in this town and a genuine tribute to leadership of this Committee, so I thank you Chairman DeFazio, Chairman Larsen, Ranking Member Graves as well as former Chairman Shuster. It is a testament to the importance of these issues.

There are safety provisions in the bill that we are all eager to see implemented, some of which are overdue and all of which need the continuing oversight of this Committee. We are tracking many components of the bill but there are several I would like to speak to today.

Seat Size and Evacuations

Section 337 requires the FAA to broadly review cabin evacuation procedures and the changes to passenger seating configurations, including seat widths, pitch, leg room and aisle width. In light of recent accidents and incidents in which passengers have had to evacuate, it is important to review seat dimensions. At American Airlines, our Flight Attendants had to evacuate a Boeing 767 on the runway at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago in October of 2016. While everyone was evacuated safely, the process raised many questions. So simply put: it's time to seriously review evacuation procedures under current, real-world conditions.

In addition, every aspect of personal space, except first class and business class aboard commercial aircraft is shrinking. In the main cabin where most passengers fly, personal space is constrained more than it has ever been. Airplanes are flying at near capacity, and not just during the busy travel seasons. Airplanes are packed full. Air rage is on the rise. Flight Attendants are inevitably drawn into the conflicts. Finally, with 28 or 29 inch seat pitch, many passengers no longer have enough space to assume the proper "brace position" in the event of an emergency landing, let alone comfortably work on their laptops.

In order to be certified, a carrier must demonstrate to the FAA that an aircraft can be safely evacuated using just half of the exits in 90 seconds or less. The truth is that many passengers are older, larger and in many cases have less mobility. When these facts are combined with reduced seat pitch and size we believe a comprehensive review of evacuation procedures is overdue. Our understanding is that the FAA has yet to initiate any formal action on this Congressional instruction.

Cabin Air Quality

While the FAA recognizes that toxic fumes jeopardize flight safety, the Agency has no standard process to collect reports from crew about fume events and no procedures to investigate such incidents. This means that the true extent of toxic fume contamination remains largely unknown and likely underreported. Last year alone, we had over 1500 fumes events reported to our union's Safety Department. My members have been hospitalized and have suffered chronic and permanent neurological damage. Once a fume event has injured a crewmember, we are forced to fight with our company and state laws to receive any type of workers' compensation which are routinely denied.

Section 326 of the FAA Bill takes important first steps in addressing this issue by collecting data and examining potential monitoring of the cabin air. Exposure to toxic fumes can be insidious. Passenger and crew can be largely unaware of their exposure until after the event. The bleed air system that is common in almost all commercial aircraft lends itself to feeding contaminated air into the cabin and ought to be at the center of any new investigation. We also support HR 2208 introduced by Rep. Garamendi which would mandate a much more specific course of action in investigating this problem and we look forward to supporting its passage. No one should ever have to question whether the air they breathe in the cabin of an aircraft is safe. Again, our focus is crew and passengers' health.

10-Hour Minimum Rest

In Section 335, Congress amended the minimum Flight Attendant rest requirement from 8 to 10 hours. We know that when Congress passed this legislation the intent was clear. Simply modify the final rule published in the Federal Register on August 19, 1994 relating to Flight Attendant duty period limitations and rest within 30 days to read as "*a flight attendant scheduled to a duty period of 14 hours or less is given a scheduled rest period of at least 10 consecutive hours; and the rest period is not reduced under any circumstances.*" Sounds simple, makes common sense, but apparently not. We are now hearing from the DOT and the FAA that it will take months to review and implement this modest change. Given the broad bipartisan support of this provision we would ask the Committee to reengage and order its timely implementation. Passengers deserve Flight Attendants who are well-rested and ready to respond at a moment's notice.

Emotional Support Animals

Section 437 of the FAA Bill addresses emotional support animals and harmonizes service animal standards. We have seen a variety of animals including monkeys, chickens, pigs, a kangaroo, a miniature penguin and even a miniature pony all brought onto the aircraft under the guise of

being “service” or “emotional support” animals. These so-called emotional support animals have been known to bite passengers and Flight Attendants, urinate, defecate, cause allergic reactions to neighboring passengers and in general be disruptive to the normal flight experience. Unregulated, these untrained animals present health and safety issues. To their credit, individual carriers are now moving to address the abuse of emotional support policies and we thank the Committee for its attention to this important matter. We doubt whether the carriers would have acted as they have without this Committee paying attention. Nobody wants passengers with legitimate and documented needs to have their trained, ADA-certified animals denied boarding. But anything short of proper regulation is unfair to other passengers and a disaster in the making.

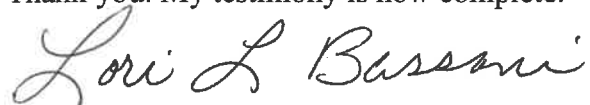
737 MAX

Lastly, we want to thank the Committee for the work you have done providing oversight on the 737 MAX tragedies. As stakeholders we appreciate that you have ensured our input into the process is heard. Not a day goes by that passengers don’t ask about the MAX. As Flight Attendants we know we are in a unique position and when the aircraft regains flight status we will be the ones in the aisles answering questions. We need to have complete confidence in the aircraft and in the process that returns it to service. We continue to look to you to ensure that that process is fully transparent.

Closing

On any given day we, can be called upon to provide medical care, fight fires, thwart security risks, provide comfort to a child traveling alone, deescalate a potential passenger conflict, explain weather delays or mechanical delays and so on, all the while being prepared to evacuate an aircraft at a moment’s notice. Passengers look to us for reassurance in all of these difficult situations. Along with our flight deck, we want to know and be able to communicate to the traveling public that we have, and will continue to have, the safest aviation system in the world.

Thank you. My testimony is now complete.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori L. Bassani". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lori L. Bassani
APFA National President