



**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**Peter A. DeFazio**  
**Chair**

**Sam Graves**  
**Ranking Member**

Katherine W. Dedrick, Staff Director

Jack Ruddy, Republican Staff Director

November 29, 2022

Acting Administrator Billy Nolen  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Acting Administrator Nolen,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) decision to allow SkyWest Airlines and Republic Airways, under emergency authority, to continue use of alternate aircraft dispatch centers, allowing dispatchers to work remotely, despite the potential safety risks. Together with air traffic controllers, airline pilots, and other aviation safety professionals, dispatchers maintain the safe and secure operation of tens of thousands of commercial flights in the national airspace system daily. The decision to allow dispatchers to work from home, in potentially unsecured conditions, raises significant safety concerns that the FAA must address.

While the FAA, in June and August 2020, granted SkyWest Airlines and Republic Airways respectively, permission to allow a percentage of aircraft dispatchers to work from remote locations due to effects from the COVID-19 pandemic, continuation of the emergency authorization when many federal pandemic policies are ending or being scaled back raises serious concerns. The original authorization was initially limited in scale and scope, allowing for no more than 20 percent of dispatchers to work from home and expiring after six months. Subsequent approvals have expanded the authorization to its current form, which allows up to 60 percent of dispatchers on any shift to work remotely through March 2023. The FAA's latest extension of this authority occurred at a time when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) rated the location of these airlines' dispatch facilities as "low risk" for the transmission of the virus. Airlines can accommodate workers at designated dispatch facilities without the need for remote dispatchers. Other airlines have been able to accommodate dispatchers in additional office space and facilities to preserve COVID precautions if necessary.

Furthermore, at no point during this process did the FAA proactively consult with representatives of the dispatch workforce or ask for public comment prior to implementing these changes, and FAA only briefed Congress after stakeholders raised these concerns to the committee. The FAA's overreliance on the airlines' self-reporting of operating conditions also presents significant concerns, given that inspections of a dispatcher's residence are conducted virtually and potential distractions or safety hazards can be missed by the airlines or the FAA.

Dispatchers have a joint responsibility, along with the flight crew, for the safety and operational control of flights under their guidance. They track and analyze meteorological conditions in real time, monitor the maintenance status and performance limitations of individual aircraft and navigational facilities, assess airport conditions, and prepare dispatch release and flight paperwork to include alternate landing sites for every commercial flight in our skies. In order to maintain the utmost safety, these duties require numerous resources within dispatch operation control centers, including well-qualified teammates, stable and secure access to the internet at all times, and an environment free from distraction. It is not a job that can be easily performed from home.

According to dispatchers from Republic Airlines, there have been alarming safety incidents reported related to dispatchers working from remote locations. On May 5, 2022, a Republic Airlines pilot could not reach a remotely assigned dispatcher for approximately 30 minutes while holding airborne for weather and preparing for a diversion into Albany, New York. In a separate incident, a dispatcher working from a dispatch center was unable to leave their post for more than 12 hours—well in excess of the 10-hour duty limitation under 14 CFR 121.465—because their relief dispatcher, working from home, did not have access to their dispatch systems during unscheduled maintenance from their internet service provider.

The FAA is well aware of the concerns presented by remote dispatching and has listed many of them in internal documents advising its air carrier safety assurance offices of what to look for when approving such a practice.<sup>1</sup> However, we are concerned that the FAA's oversight of this practice does not appear to be at the same level as dispatch operations conducted from a dispatch center. We ask that the FAA provide written answers to the following questions by December 12, 2022, and brief the committee on this issue in detail:

- (1) What oversight systems does the FAA have in place to ensure that remote dispatching, particularly from a person's home, is constantly operating at the same standards of safety as dispatching from airline dispatch centers?
- (2) How are FAA inspectors performing their duties with regard to at-home dispatchers?
- (3) How are dispatchers' privacy rights being maintained in this process?
- (4) Does the FAA intend to make these emergency authorizations permanent? If so, what statutory or other legal authorities allows for such an action?

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



PETER A. DEFAZIO  
Chair



RICK LARSEN  
Chair, Subcommittee on Aviation

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<sup>1</sup> Aviation Safety Memo, March 20, 2020; Subject: Operational Control Part 121 Air Carriers