

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2025

Chris Rocheleau  
Acting Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Acting Administrator Rocheleau,

We write to express our considerable concerns regarding the safety of aircraft operations in and around Washington National Airport (DCA). In the wake of the tragic January 29, 2025 midair collision, the operational challenges at DCA were thrust into the spotlight, drawing increased scrutiny and attention.<sup>1</sup> This includes numerous underlying issues, such as problems with existing standard operating procedures (SOP) and air traffic controller resourcing.<sup>2</sup> In response, the FAA has made urgent safety changes which we strongly support, including the prohibition of operations on helicopter route 4 at DCA, the examination of helicopter operations at 21 other U.S. airports in 10 metro areas,<sup>3</sup> a review of air traffic controllers staffing levels at the DCA tower, and an evaluation of DCA's current hourly aircraft arrival rates.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these efforts, incidents at DCA continue to occur at an alarming rate. On Thursday, March 27, two air traffic controllers at DCA's tower were involved in a physical altercation, with one controller being arrested and put on administrative leave while the FAA investigates the matter.<sup>5</sup> Although the cause of the altercation has yet to be determined, we remain concerned that the mounting stress arising from the January 29 accident is having a lasting effect on air traffic controllers at DCA and that FAA's dispatching of a 'stress management team,' while welcome, may be an insufficient response.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See NTSB: Midair Collision PSA Airlines Bombardier CRJ700 Airplane and Sikorsky UH-60 Military Helicopter (Accessed: Apr. 4, 2025), available at: <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/Pages/DCA25MA108.aspx>; see also FAA: FAA Statements on Aviation Accidents and Incidents, at Jan. 29, 2025 (Accessed: Apr. 4, 2025), available at: [https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/statements/accident\\_incidents](https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/statements/accident_incidents).

<sup>2</sup> NTSB, *Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report*, DCA25MA108 (Mar. 11, 2025), available at: <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/Documents/DCA25MA108%20Prelim.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> NTSB Preliminary Report: the DCA Midair Collision, *Hearing Before the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation*, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2025) (Testimony of Chris Rocheleau Acting Administrator); see also Email from FAA to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure staff (Mar. 27, 2025) (on file with Comm.).

<sup>4</sup> David Shepardson, *US Army withholds report on key helicopter safety system use, senators say*, Reuters (Mar. 31, 2025), available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/us-army-withholds-report-key-helicopter-safety-system-use-senators-say-2025-03-31/>.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandra Skores and Pete Muntean, *FAA 'stress management team' to meet with controllers at Reagan Airport following mid-air collision and control tower fight*, CNN (Apr. 2, 2025), available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/02/us/stress-management-team-to-meet-with-controllers/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

On Friday, March 28, there was another alarming loss of separation between a military aircraft and civilian commercial carrier.<sup>7</sup> According to numerous sources, a flight of four Air Force T-38 Talons was conducting a flyby of the Arlington National Cemetery (ANC), at which point DCA was advised to stop departures. Despite the notification, DCA continued to launch departures as the group of Talons continued inbound to the ANC. After Delta Airlines Flight 2983 departed Runway 19, separation was lost with the Talons, resulting in a serious near-miss event that allowed a distance between the two aircraft to be as close as 3,900 feet laterally and 100 feet vertically.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, on Thursday, April 10, 2025, two American Eagle flights, Flight 5490 operated by PSA Airlines and Flight 4522 operated by Republic Airways, made contact on a DCA taxiway.<sup>9</sup> Together these planes were transporting a total of 143 passengers to Charleston International Airport (CHS) in South Carolina and John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) in New York. Thankfully, there were no reported injuries and both aircraft safely returned to the terminal and were taken out of service for inspection. However, this event is yet another in a growing pattern of concerning incidents at this congested airport.

Given these significant ongoing issues at DCA, we call for the FAA to take the following actions:

- Immediately implement, in coordination with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, the Collaborative Resource Working Group (CRWG) staffing targets at the DCA air traffic control tower and ensure that any necessary support roles are also fully staffed.
- Maintain the reduced hourly aircraft arrival rate at DCA to the rate put in place after standard operations first resumed on all three runways on or around February 11, 2025, at least until the—
  - DCA control tower is fully staffed in alignment with the CRWG staffing targets; and
  - FAA fully addresses the safety risks identified from the agency's ongoing safety risk management panel (SRMP) review of DCA, including any risks identified from the analysis of the additional factors enumerated below.
- Evaluate and, as appropriate, modify any agreements or established SOPs with the Department of Defense and any other relevant governmental agencies pertaining to flight operations in the DCA capital region to ensure the safety of the flying public.
- Commence, at minimum, monthly briefings for our Committees describing—

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<sup>7</sup> Alexandra Skores, Pete Muntean, and Aaron Cooper, *Collision warning sounds in cockpit of Delta plane due to close call with Air Force jet near Reagan National Airport*, CNN (Mar. 31, 2025), available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/28/us/delta-military-jet-close-call-dca/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*; Osman Jamil, *Delta Air Lines A319-USAF T-38 Near Miss at DCA*, Airways Mag. (Mar. 30, 2025), available at: <https://www.airwaysmag.com/new-post/delta-a319-usaf-t-38-near-miss-dca>; Pete Muntean, *Near-collision investigation reveals Reagan National Airport controllers failed to stop flights during military flyover*, CNN (Apr. 8, 2025), available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/08/politics/reagan-national-airport-near-collision-investigation-military-flyover/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandra Skores, Annie Grayer and Sarah Ferris, *Planes bump wings on the ground at Washington's Reagan National Airport*, CNN (Apr. 10, 2025), available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/10/travel/planes-bump-wings-on-the-ground-at-washingtons-reagan-national-airport/index.html>.

- Aviation safety incidents that occur in the DCA capital region, including identified airspace risks;
- Reforms the FAA or other agencies are actively implementing to improve the safety of DCA and its surrounding airspace; and
- Progress of the DCA SRMP and the implementation of its recommendations.

In addition to the above actions, the FAA should ensure it is conducting a comprehensive analysis reviewing issues that may not currently be within the scope of the existing DCA SRMP. We urge you to either extend the scope and timeline for the existing DCA SRMP or conduct a separate review to sufficiently examine the following factors pertaining to DCA and its surrounding airspace:

- Congestion levels at DCA and its surrounding airspace;
- Any outstanding NTSB recommendations that, if implemented immediately, could improve the safety of DCA and its surrounding airspace;
- Existing data from the DCA capital region that has been collected but not analyzed, with the purpose of identifying presently unknown risks to aviation safety;
- Staffing levels of the DCA air traffic control tower and related facilities;
- General mental health of aviation professionals working or operating at DCA, including air traffic controllers, pilots, and airport first responders;
- Effectiveness and timeliness of mental health resources provided to these professionals, particularly after aviation accidents and other emergencies;
- Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) usage on aircraft operating near DCA; and
- Communication practices between air traffic controllers and flight crews, including—
  - The segregation of various aircraft communications frequencies; and
  - Air traffic controller and pilot callback standards and best practices;

While it may take time for the NTSB to determine the causes of the tragic January 29 midair collision over the Potomac, we can act now to ensure safer skies for the flying public. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on  
Transportation and  
Infrastructure



Steve Cohen  
Ranking Member  
House Subcommittee on  
Aviation



Tammy Duckworth  
Ranking Member  
Senate Subcommittee on  
Aviation, Space, and  
Innovation