

Congress of the United States

U.S. House of Representatives

April 14, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Duffy and Secretary Noem:

We are deeply concerned about the recent use of counter-unmanned aircraft systems (C-UAS) by the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) that resulted in false Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) alerts last month on several commercial passenger aircraft operating near Washington National Airport (DCA).¹ These erroneous alerts caused confusion among flight crews in one of the most complex airspaces in the country, introducing an unnecessary safety risk that potentially endangered hundreds of American lives.² Furthermore, according to information shared by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), during these incidents, the USSS allegedly breached its lawful obligations when it violated agreed-upon operating parameters and failed to comply with notification requirements, as established with the FAA in compliance with section 124n of Title 6 of the United States Code.³ At such a tenuous time for U.S. aviation, this blatant disregard for long-standing safety protocols is entirely unacceptable.

During the first week of March 2025, a series of TCAS alerts—automated warnings that advise a pilot on actions needed to avoid an imminent collision—incorrectly recommended ten resolution advisories and three aircraft go-arounds to commercial and U.S. Coast Guard aircraft in the vicinity of DCA.⁴ Shortly thereafter, the FAA’s spectrum analysis identified that an activation of USSS C-UAS technology at a nearby Department of Defense (DOD) location was the cause of these false alerts.⁵ The FAA confirmed that the system in question was approved for operation within a specific radio frequency parameter and with the necessary filtering to prevent interference into adjacent spectrum bands, to which the USSS allegedly agreed. However, the FAA determined that despite its pre-deployment coordination with the USSS, the agency operated this C-UAS system outside of the agreed-upon requirements. Even more troubling, the

¹ David Shepherdson, *Navy, Secret Service counter-drone technology testing led to faulty cockpit alerts, officials say*, REUTERS, (Mar. 27, 2025), available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/secret-service-navy-testing-counter-drone-technology-led-faulty-cockpit-alerts-2025-03-27/>.

² Kris Van Cleve, *Flights to Reagan National Airport in D.C. received false collision alerts while landing*, CBS NEWS, (Mar. 4, 2025), available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/dc-airport-false-collision-alerts/>

³ 6 U.S. Code § 124n(b)(2) and (d)(2).

⁴ *C-UAS Aviation Safety- Recent DCA Airport TCAS Anomalies*, FAA, Briefing to House Authorizing Committees staff (Mar. 31, 2025) (on file with Comm.).

⁵ *Id.*

FAA did not receive any notifications from USSS about this C-UAS activation, in violation of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Concept of Operations (CONOPS).

As you are well aware, on January 29, our nation experienced one of the worst aviation accidents in recent memory with the mid-air collision of a U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopter and American Airlines Flight 5342 near DCA.⁶ It was the first major U.S. commercial passenger flight to crash in nearly 16 years and tragically claimed the lives of 67 people on board both aircraft. Since then, DCA has been plagued with aircraft near-misses and other pressing safety challenges.⁷ The flying public cannot afford for these safety issues to continue and certainly should not be collateral damage due to your Departments' inability to coordinate effectively.

DHS staff has notified us of a new internal investigation into the recent TCAS anomalies at DCA,⁸ and it is our expectation that your Departments work together to determine all contributing factors to these incidents and develop a plan to prevent similar incidents from happening again at DCA or any other U.S. airport. Additionally, to gain further clarity into what led to these concerning incidents, we request a joint briefing and written responses to the following questions as soon as possible, but no later than Monday, April 21, 2025:

1. What unmanned aircraft system (UAS) detection and/or mitigation system(s) was activated by the USSS during this incident that caused the TCAS anomalies near DCA?
2. Was the deployment of the system(s) in question part of a testing effort by the USSS as reported⁹ or in response to a potential UAS threat?
3. What were the FAA's specific operating parameters for the safe deployment of such system(s) and when were these requirements communicated to the USSS?
4. During your pre-deployment coordination, did the USSS agree to the FAA's operating parameters? If so, when? If not, what is the USSS' rationale for not complying with these terms, and when was this communicated to the FAA?
5. Did the USSS notify the FAA of the activation of the UAS detection and/or mitigation system(s) in accordance with the CONOPS? If so, when and through what means?
6. When did the USSS first become aware of the TCAS anomalies at DCA, and what actions did the agency take with FAA to mitigate the impacts?
7. Was there radio frequency interference into any other spectrum bands during this incident?

⁶ National Transportation Safety Board, *Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report- Accident Number DCA25MA108*, (Mar. 11, 2025), available at: <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/Documents/DCA25MA108%20Prelim.pdf>

⁷ Juliana Kim, *Delta plane and Air Force jet ordered to maneuver to avoid collision near DCA airport*, NPR, (Mar. 29, 2025), available at: <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/29/nx-s1-5344430/delta-plane-dca-close-call-air-force>; see also Russel Lewis, *'There's a serious safety issue,' investigators say following DCA midair collision*, NPR, (Mar. 12, 2025), available at: <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/11/nx-s1-5324543/ntsb-dca-mid-air-collision-american-black-hawk>.

⁸ *House of Representatives Spring 2025 Semi-annual 6 U.S.C. 124n C-UAS Briefing*, DHS/DOJ/FAA, Briefing to House Authorizing Committees staff, (April 3, 2025) (on file with Comm.).

⁹ *Supra* at 1.

8. In light of these incidents, has DHS reviewed all its C-UAS systems to ensure compliance with radio frequency parameters and filtering requirements? If so, what were the findings of this review?
9. What communications has the FAA provided to all operators of C-UAS systems to notify them of lessons learned and prevent the recurrence of similar incidents?
10. What actions are your Departments taking to improve your interagency coordination on C-UAS missions and compliance with the CONOPS?

We recognize the key roles your respective Departments play in protecting critical facilities and assets from the growing threats of malicious drone incursions. However, these security efforts cannot come at the expense of the safety of the flying public and airspace users. As such, we continue to support the passage of our bipartisan legislation, *the Counter-UAS Authority Security, Safety, and Reauthorization Act*, to create the foundation for a safe and responsible expansion of C-UAS technologies and strike the right balance between the considerable aviation safety, national security, privacy, and civil liberties issues related to C-UAS activities.

We look forward to working with you on this important endeavor and to your expeditious responses to our inquiries.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security

cc: Chris Rocheleau, Acting Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration
Sean Curran, Director, United States Secret Service