

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 3, 2024

Dear Colleagues:

We write to urge you to support the retention of Section 502 of the conferenced Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill and to clarify why this provision is critical to expanding affordable access to Washington, D.C. for your constituents.

We appreciate Chairs Cantwell and Graves; Ranking Members Cruz and Larsen; Leaders Schumer, McConnell, and Jeffries; and Speaker Johnson for their tireless efforts to negotiate a strong, bipartisan, FAA reauthorization bill. This legislation supports our pilots, air traffic controllers, and technical experts. It ushers in the next generation of American aviation and continues to improve the safety of the world's safest aviation system.

Importantly, this legislation also expands access to affordable air service and economic opportunity by authorizing just five new daily round trip slots at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA).

DCA is a gateway to the nation's capital and all the cultural, historic, and governmental resources and assets the Washington, D.C. region has to offer. More importantly, DCA serves as the gateway for Americans to exercise their constitutional right to petition their government. We believe access to DCA should be as unrestricted as possible, and that travel options to and from Washington, D.C. should be numerous, affordable, and efficient.

That's why we introduced the bipartisan *DCA Act* (S.1933), which would authorize new flights at DCA and ultimately increase competition and lower costs for consumers at one of the nation's most important travel gateways. Section 502 of the conferenced FAA bill represents months of careful bipartisan negotiations, including rigorous consultation with the FAA, that ultimately reduced our initial proposal to add 28 additional round trip flights to just five and produced the only bipartisan compromise in either chamber's FAA reauthorization package that equitably allocates new flights at DCA while maintaining existing service to the nation's capital, increasing airline competition, and lowering costs for consumers.

We would also like to address some of the good faith concerns raised by our colleagues regarding the safety and efficiency of operations at DCA. We prioritized safety in drafting this provision and strongly believe, if enacted into law, the FAA will not implement the provision in any way that would undermine safety at one of the nation's most important airports. We also want to be clear: there is no evidence to support that any near-miss incident at DCA has ever been a byproduct of an overburdened airport. These incidents have nothing to do with slots and everything to do with making sure controllers have the training and technology to keep our skies and runways safe. The good news is that Congress is addressing those very issues in the conferenced FAA bill by establishing a zero-tolerance policy for near misses, runway incursions, and surface safety risks. This legislation deploys runway alerting technologies at all medium and large hub airports, requires the FAA to implement improved staffing standards developed with the labor workforce to close controller staffing gaps, and increases access to advanced training systems for controllers.

We are proud that this bipartisan legislation will have a real impact on minimizing the frequency of near-miss incidents at our nation's airports.

With respect to our colleagues' concerns about five additional daily round trip flights overburdening DCA and leading to delay, we would like to provide a couple of clarifying statistics. According to data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, DCA is one of the nation's most on-time airports, with an on-time performance metric that beats the national average.<sup>1</sup> What's more, according to a recent communication from the FAA, five new round trip flights at DCA could, at most, add approximately three minutes of delay to already delayed flights.

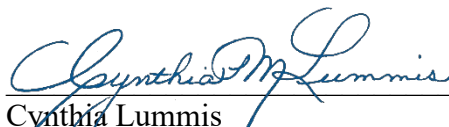
We leave you with the recent testimony of FAA Administrator Michael Whitaker. Testifying before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on February 6, 2024, Administrator Whitaker noted that DCA does have additional slot capacity available, concluding if additional flights were authorized at DCA "[the FAA] will always make sure [DCA] is operating safely."<sup>2</sup> We hope that the Administrator's testimony provides the necessary assurances that, not only will additional flights at DCA result in a host of consumer and travel benefits to your constituents, but additional flights can also be accommodated safely and with minimal operational delays.

We respectfully believe you should vote based on the interests of your constituents, not the interests of other airports in the Washington, D.C. region. Section 502 of the conferenced FAA bill would authorize five new round trip flights through DCA, bringing more travelers to the nation's capital along with a host of pro-consumer, pro-competition benefits to Washington, D.C. travelers. We urge you to retain the entirety of Section 502 in a final FAA reauthorization package and look forward to supporting a bill that includes this carefully negotiated, bipartisan provision.

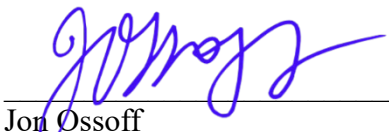
Sincerely,



Reverend Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator



Cynthia Lummis  
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator



Mike Lee  
Member of Congress

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<sup>1</sup> *Airline On-Time Statistics and Delay Causes*, Bureau of Transportation Statistics (January 2023 – December 2023), [https://www.transtats.bts.gov/OT\\_Delay/OT\\_DelayCause1.asp?20=E](https://www.transtats.bts.gov/OT_Delay/OT_DelayCause1.asp?20=E)

<sup>2</sup> *The State of American Aviation and the Federal Aviation Administration: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Aviation of the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure*. 118<sup>th</sup> Cong. (February 6, 2024) (statement of Mr. Michael Whitaker, Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration), <https://transportation.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=407183> at 1:59.00 – 2:00.15.