FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION REAUTHORIZATION

WHAT THE BILL DOES

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2016 reauthorizes the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and related programs through the end of fiscal year 2017. Highlights include:

UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS (UAS) OR DRONES - Addresses safety and privacy issues, boosts enforcement, and clarifies federal and local roles regarding drones while creating new opportunities for testing and promoting innovative uses of this technology, subject to FAA approval.

AIRCRAFT CERTIFICATION REFORMS - Helps U.S. aerospace manufacturing by improving the FAA's processes for certifying aircraft designs and modifications, as well as ensuring the benefits of such certification processes for manufacturers competing in global markets.

CONSUMER PROTECTION & AVIATION ACCESS - Includes new consumer protections for the flying public, maintains access for rural communities, and takes steps to help passengers with disabilities and certain medical conditions during air travel.

AIRLINE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS - Includes new requirements on the bulk transfer of lithium batteries, mental health screening and records retention for commercial pilots, increasing awareness of human trafficking for airline personnel, and improving communicable disease preparedness.

GENERAL AVIATION SAFETY & PROTECTIONS - Addresses concerns of the general aviation community by including the bipartisan Pilot's Bill of Rights 2, which reforms the Third Class Medical Certificate process for non-commercial pilots. Also includes new requirements for small tower markings.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL & NEXTGEN - Acts on recommendations of independent government watchdogs for improving the FAA's transition to 21st century air traffic control technologies known collectively as "NextGen" as well as addressing cybersecurity concerns.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT & STUDY - Increases authorized funding for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), which pays for infrastructure like runways, by $400 million to an annual level of $3.75 billion, and streamlines the application process for Passenger Facility Charges (PFC). Requires a study and recommendations on upgrading and restoring the nation's airport infrastructure.

HOW THE BILL MODERNIZES AVIATION

UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS (UAS) OR DRONES

DRONE SAFETY FEATURES - Directs federal agencies to convene industry stakeholders to develop consensus standards for safety features to be built into drones to protect everyone who uses the national airspace and the public.

PRIVACY PROTECTIONS – Affirms that UAS operations should respect personal privacy, consistent with federal, state, and local law, advances drone identification standards to create operator accountability, and promotes adoption of written UAS privacy policies.

ONLINE SAFETY TEST - Promotes safety by requiring all drone users to pass an FAA-approved online aeronautical safety test before flying. This ensures users understand the national airspace system and avoid manned aircraft.

SAFETY RULE ENFORCEMENT - Authorizes funds for FAA initiatives to better enforce drone laws and reduce risks.

AIRPORT PROTECTION - Authorizes FAA pilot programs and funds to intercept drones near airports and critical infrastructure.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION - Fosters innovation by authorizing expanded case by case exemptions for beyond visual line of sight and nighttime operations, as well as for research and development or commercial purposes.

FEDERAL & LOCAL RESPONSIBILITIES - Clarifies responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments with respect to the regulation of drones and directs the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to identify remaining gaps in current privacy protections.

UAS TEST SITES - Improves established UAS test sites, first authorized in 2012, by directing research priorities, improving coordination with the FAA, and enhancing protections for proprietary information to encourage more engagement with the private sector.

AIRCRAFT CERTIFICATION REFORM, I.E. FAA'S PROCESS FOR APPROVING AIRCRAFT DESIGNS

GLOBAL COMPETITION - Enhances U.S. competitiveness in aerospace manufacturing by helping get products to market faster through improved certification processes, reducing cost, and promoting U.S. products.

UTILIZING OUTSIDE EXPERTISE - Streamlines costly certification processes through which the FAA approves new aircraft designs and modifications by requiring the FAA to better utilize its existing delegation authorities. Establishes an advisory committee to recommend further process improvements.

LEADERSHIP ABROAD - Requires the FAA to focus on international engagement and leadership related to U.S.-developed standards through facilitating approvals of U.S. aerospace products and services abroad.

FAA WORKFORCE - Improves the quality of the FAA safety workforce by assessing relevant FAA employee training needs, reviewing the current hiring and training requirements, analyzing the skills and qualifications of aviation safety inspectors and engineers, and developing knowledge-sharing opportunities.

CONSUMER PROTECTION & AVIATION ACCESS

NEW CONSUMER BENEFITS

⇒ TRUTH IN WEATHER DELAYS - Directs the Department of Transportation to review how airlines provide information on decisions to delay or cancel flights that may be fully or only partially due to weather related causes.

⇒ NOTICE TO FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN - Requires airlines to provide families with information about the availability of seats together at the time of booking.

⇒ DISCLOSURE OF FEES - Creates a standard method for airlines to disclose airlines' ancillary fees (baggage, seat selection).

⇒ REFUNDS FOR DELAYED BAGGAGE - Requires airlines to return baggage fees when items are lost or delayed.

⇒ AUTOMATIC REFUNDS - Requires airlines to automatically return fees for services purchased but not received (seat assignments, early boarding, carry-on bags).

ONBOARD EMERGENCY MEDICAL KIT UPDATE - Provides for an update of onboard emergency medical kit contents.

PROTECTING RURAL SERVICE - Maintains access to our nation's aviation system for millions of Americans in rural areas by reauthorizing the Essential Air Service Program and the Small Community Air Service Development Program.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES - Takes steps to improve air travel for persons with disabilities by requiring a review of training and best practices by airports and airlines, and creates an advisory committee.

AIRLINE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

LITHIUM BATTERIES - Implements international safety standards on bulk transport of lithium batteries and reviews existing regulations and potential improvements to battery safety.

MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING - Enhances requirements related to mental health screening for commercial pilots and improves a voluntarily safety reporting program for pilots.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING - Directs airlines to bolster flight attendant training on how to identify and report incidents of human trafficking.

PILOT RECORD DATABASE - Sets a statutory deadline for FAA's pilot record database, required under the Airline Safety Act and Federal Aviation Administration Extension Act of 2010, to ensure that airlines, when hiring, have information regarding pilots training, testing, and employment history.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREPAREDNESS - Improves preparedness for communicable disease outbreaks, following through on GAO recommendations in the wake of the 2015 Ebola outbreak, by directing federal agencies to establish a comprehensive, aviation-specific preparedness plan.

AUTOMATION SAFETY ISSUES - Directs the FAA to update guidance regarding flight deck automation and monitoring, a key factor in recent fatal accidents.

GENERAL AVIATION SAFETY & PROTECTIONS

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION REFORM - Reinvigorates general aviation with reforms to the Third Class Medical Certificate process for non-commercial pilots and an enhanced appeals process, including *de novo* review, for pilots facing FAA enforcement.

SMALL TOWER MARKINGS - Enhances safety for low-altitude general aviation flying, like agricultural-applicators, by requiring marking of certain small towers.

UNLEADED AVIATION FUEL TRANSITION - Ensures the FAA clearly identifies alternatives to traditional aviation gasoline and adopts a process to ensure the safety of modifications to existing aircraft prior to a transition to unleaded aviation fuel.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL & NEXTGEN, I.E. THE TRANSITION TO 21ST CENTURY AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

AIR-TRAFFIC-CONTROLLER INTERVIEWS - Requires that all air-traffic controller candidates receive an in-person interview with the FAA before being hired and beginning training.

NEXTGEN TRANSITION - Follows-up on recommendations made by the Department of Transportation Office of the Inspector General and GAO to improve NextGen transition management, mitigate risks to NextGen interoperability with foreign countries, and assess NextGen acquisition practices.

CYBERSECURITY - Implements National Research Council recommendations directing FAA to incorporate cybersecurity measures and human factors throughout the development and rollout of NextGen programs, and attracting an even more qualified workforce to manage these programs.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT - Requires the FAA to assess each NextGen program and provide a report to Congress on how each program improves safety and efficiency and to provide an estimated date that each program will have a positive return on investment for aviation users and the government.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

AIRPORT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM - Supports jobs and improves safety with increased infrastructure investment by authorizing funding for the Airport Improvement Program at $3.75 billion, a $400 million increase over current levels.

STREAMLINING PFC APPLICATION - Streamlines the PFC application process to eliminate unnecessary paperwork.