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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

January 17, 2026

The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Thune, Leader Schumer, Chair Collins, and Vice Chair Murray:

On January 29, 2025, 67 people were tragically killed when a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter collided with a commercial airliner, American Airlines flight 5342, on approach to the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). The accident was preventable and should never have happened.

We write to request you include the bipartisan Rotorcraft Operations Transparency and Oversight Reform (ROTOR) Act (S.2503) in the Fiscal Year 2026 Transportation Housing and Urban Development Appropriations package currently being negotiated. The Senate unanimously passed the ROTOR Act on December 17, 2025. The ROTOR Act also has the support of the Department of Transportation, the Pentagon, Federal Aviation Administration, National Transportation Safety Board, and the families of the 67 victims.

While the ROTOR Act addresses critical safety shortfalls and loopholes that contributed to the DCA mid-air collision, the safety enhancements will apply nationwide. The legislation would require all aircraft to use automatic dependent broadcast surveillance (ADS-B) In, a near-real-time location broadcasting technology faster than ground-based radar, everywhere ADS-B Out is currently required, a recommendation issued by the NTSB more than twenty years ago.

Widespread adoption of ADS-B In will enhance situational awareness in the air as well as at airports, providing real-time safety tools to pilots that will reduce near-misses on the ground. Critically, the Senate-passed ROTOR Act also repeals section 373(a) of the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 119-60), which safety advocates have warned could jeopardize aviation safety in DC-area airspace.

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In addition to requiring ADS-B In equipage and usage, the ROTOR Act would improve FAA coordination with the military on aviation safety data, require the FAA to evaluate the airspace around airports across the country to identify any other airspace designs that allow fixed wing and rotorcraft traffic to fly close together and any other risks to commercial airline traffic at airports, and close loopholes that allow military aircraft to operate in civil airspace without broadcasting their location using ADS-B Out. Simply put, the ROTOR Act puts safety first and will save lives.

The FY2026 THUD bill will provide funding for the Department of Transportation and the FAA. Including ROTOR in this legislation is our priority, and including it in conference is the best way to avoid any unnecessary delays in closing critical safety loopholes. Floor amendments would require the House to pass the legislation for a second time, close to the end of January when current appropriations are set to lapse. We make our request to avoid this scenario and enact the ROTOR Act's meaningful aviation safety reforms as soon as possible.

Thank you for your support of the ROTOR Act and for strengthening aviation safety. We are happy to discuss further to help advance this legislation.

Sincerely,



Ted Cruz
Chairman



Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member