

**TESTIMONY OF CHRIS ROCHELEAU
ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, SPACE, AND INNOVATION
NTSB PRELIMINARY REPORT: THE DCA MIDAIR COLLISION
MARCH 27, 2025**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Duckworth, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) preliminary report on the midair collision of PSA Airlines flight 5342 and a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter that occurred in January, near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, or DCA.

I would like to begin by offering my sincerest sympathies to the families and loved ones of those who perished in recent accidents, including the accident near DCA. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continues to support the ongoing NTSB investigations. Our work with the NTSB will help us understand the factors that contributed to these accidents, and we will use the data to inform future FAA actions.

Aviation safety is the FAA's number one priority. While flying remains the safest mode of transportation, aviation safety is not static. There is always room for improvement. The professionals at the FAA take their jobs seriously and strive to ensure safety every day. But the fact of the matter is that we have to do better. We have to identify trends, we have to get smarter about how we use data, and when we put corrective actions in place, we must execute them.

I want to thank Chairman Homendy and the entire NTSB team for their diligence in the ongoing investigation. Earlier this month, the NTSB issued a preliminary report and two urgent safety recommendations. The recommendations align with the actions the FAA took, under

Secretary Duffy's leadership, to restrict helicopter operations around DCA immediately following the accident, eliminating mixed helicopter and fixed-wing traffic. Following the NTSB recommendations, the FAA took action to make these restrictions permanent. When essential helicopter operations, such as lifesaving medical, active law enforcement, active air defense, or presidential transport, must operate in the flight-restricted airspace, fixed-wing aircraft are not allowed in that airspace.

We are continuing to analyze other airports that have both charted helicopter routes and nearby airplane traffic. The FAA also is assessing the Gulf of America, including offshore helicopter operations. As part of this analysis, we are using machine learning and language modeling to scan incident reports and mine multiple data sources to find themes and areas of risk. We will take immediate action if needed to mitigate any identified safety risks. In addition, I will establish a Safety Risk Management Panel and engage with aviation stakeholders to identify additional hazard areas involving helicopter and fixed-wing interactions.

We're bolstering aviation safety in other ways, too. Air traffic controller staffing is a top priority as air traffic controllers play a critical role in keeping the American people safe. Right now, we have more than 10,750 air traffic controllers on the job with more than 3,000 in training. We intend to hire another 2,000 controller trainees this year. Consistent with Secretary Duffy's announcement on supercharged air traffic controller hiring, we have streamlined the hiring process to improve efficiency by changing the previous 8-step process to a 5-step process, which will accelerate the time-to-hire for these critical positions by five months or more, bringing new air traffic controllers on the job much faster. We've also incentivized hiring with a 30 percent increase in the salary of those who qualify to attend the FAA's Academy. And we are already seeing positive results from these improvements. During the hiring surge that closed last

week, we received more than 10,000 applications. More than 8,300 of those were referred to testing.

We also continue to maintain rigorous oversight of Boeing to ensure the safety and compliance of its aircraft designs and operations. This oversight extends to ongoing monitoring of Boeing's manufacturing practices, maintenance procedures, and software updates. We are working closely with Boeing to address any safety concerns and to ensure that all required modifications and improvements are made to meet the highest safety standards.

We have a strong foundation at the FAA, and we're going to make our agency even stronger. We are refocusing our energy and directing all of our resources to safety. And we'll continue to recruit, train, and retain the best and brightest for our FAA team.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I also thank President Trump and Secretary Duffy for putting their faith in me to lead the FAA during this time. The work we do at the FAA isn't easy, but it's vitally important. And I'm proud to once again be part of the FAA team.