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**FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION**

**BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE**
**COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION**

**"FAA REAUTHORIZATION ONE YEAR LATER:**
**AVIATION SAFETY, AIR TRAFFIC, AND NEXT GENERATION TECHNOLOGY"**

**MAY 14, 2025**

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share some updates on behalf of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regarding the agency's efforts to implement the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (the Act) as we approach the first anniversary of its enactment.

The Act, which runs through fiscal year 2028, communicates congressional priorities for the agency's mission to provide the world's safest, most efficient aerospace system. It is broad in scope and speaks to everything from FAA's staffing, ways to bolster many of the agency's oversight processes, and where to invest resources to support safety and efficiency for both conventional users and new entrants. The Act has several hundred requirements, the bulk of which fall primarily under the purview of the Aviation Safety Organization, the Air Traffic Organization, and the Office of Airports.

The FAA made significant progress in implementing the Act's requirements during the past year. We want to highlight some of those accomplishments for you today.

**Aviation Safety**

Building on our commitment to continuous improvement of our certification process and safety oversight, we updated guidance applicable to our risk model for production approval holder inspections and implemented enhancements to the processing and analysis of safety data.

The Act requires the FAA to review and update its Production Approval Holder (PAH) risk model to ensure it adequately accounts for risk at facilities "during periods of increased production."[1] The FAA policy applicable to Aviation Safety Inspectors (ASI) overseeing PAH recognizes that changes in production rates—both increases and decreases—can increase risk. An FAA team reviewed the policy and determined that it would benefit from improved guidance on how to respond when a PAH experiences a change in production rate. As a result, in April, the FAA issued additional guidance to ASIs on performing a risk assessment when a PAH's production rate changes; how to use the risk assessment results; when to add audits; how to customize an audit plan to focus on the areas of highest risk; and which facilities and suppliers to audit.

Regarding the Act's direction to improve the Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing program (ASIAS) concerning safety data sharing and risk mitigation, the FAA accelerated the procurement of a commercially available solution to modernize ASIAS. This includes using commercial cloud-based solutions to store and process ASIAS data. More than 30 million digital flight records voluntarily submitted by airline stakeholders have moved to a cloud-based platform. ASIAS has also initiated the implementation of a new advanced technology tool to process safety data more rapidly and produce safety intelligence that we can use to identify trends and mitigate risks.[2]

[1] Pub. L. No. 118-63, § 314 (2024).
[2] *Id.,* § 348.

As we implement the Act's requirements, we continually examine the effectiveness of our oversight processes and make necessary improvements to ensure accountability. We continue to maintain rigorous oversight of Boeing's manufacturing, including implementation of its safety management system. And we appreciate Congress's additional support in extending several provisions of the Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act and adding annual training requirements for Organization Designation Authorization unit members to include ethics, professionalism, and safety concern reporting processes.[3]

**Advanced Aviation Operations and Technologies**

As we enhance the safety of the national airspace system (NAS) for current users, we are also focused on integrating new and emerging aviation technologies, including Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). AAM is an umbrella term for aircraft that are typically highly automated, electrically powered, and have vertical take-off and landing capability. Last month, Secretary Duffy announced the establishment of the Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies (CAAT), to be operated by the Texas A&M University System.[4] The CAAT will play a pivotal role in advancing aviation technologies and ensuring their safe integration into the NAS. The center will also represent a collaboration between government, academia, and industry to drive innovation in aviation.

The Act contains several sections focused on supporting U.S. leadership in AAM.[5] Many AAM aircraft fall into the powered-lift category. We are pleased to report that the FAA is ready for powered-lift, which will be the first brand-new category of civil aircraft in almost a century. Late last year, the FAA met the Act's requirement for publishing a Special Federal Aviation

[3] *See* Pub. L. No. 116-260, Div. V, Title I, §§ 303-304, 306 (2020).
[4] Pub. L. No. 118-63, § 961 (2024).
[5] *See, e.g., id.,* § 951, et seq.

Regulation on powered-lift instructor and pilot certification, pilot training, and operating rules.[6] The FAA will gather data and information through regulatory requirements and the Aviation Rulemaking Committee required by the Act to develop a permanent regulatory framework for powered-lift.

The Act also expresses congressional priorities for continuing to integrate unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), or drones, into the NAS. While the FAA provides regulatory relief to enable certain more complex UAS operations, such as operations beyond the operator's visual line of sight (BVLOS), normalizing BVLOS operations through rulemaking remains a top priority for the FAA.[7]

**Modernization**

As we work to integrate advanced aviation technologies and aircraft into the NAS, we must prioritize NAS modernization for increased capacity and efficiency. President Trump and Secretary Duffy made clear their priority to deliver an all-new, state-of-the-art air traffic control system that makes air travel safer and more efficient for the American people. In line with the Administration's priorities and congressional direction, the FAA's first step is accelerating the modernization of the Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) system this year, much earlier than originally planned. The system will be securely hosted in the cloud and have a scalable and resilient architecture. We expect delivery by July 2025 and are targeting operational deployment of the modernized service by September 2025.

**FAA Process Improvements**

The Act directs the FAA to improve communication and timely decision-making on matters before the agency, including applications for aircraft registration and air carrier

[6] *Id.,* § 955.
[7] *Id.,* § 930.

certification. We agree that there is room for process improvements and increased accountability to our stakeholders. Thus far, we have reduced the aircraft registration backlog, and applications are now processed within an average of 10 business days or less.[8]

We also shortened the time frame for determining acceptance or rejection of air carrier, air operator, and air agency certificate applications. Notably, while the target set by Congress is for the FAA to maintain an average application or rejection timeframe of less than 60 days for part 135 air carrier certificates within one year of enactment, the average acceptance or rejection timeframe for these applications is now just 31 business days.[9] We attribute the resulting timeliness and backlog improvements to adjustments to documentation requirements during the design assessment phase to streamline single pilot air carrier certifications under 14 CFR part 135, the establishment of a Flight Standards certification team that exclusively focuses on certification projects to assist with additional certification capacity, and policy enhancements to foster applicant accountability and readiness.

**FAA Staffing**

As Congress recognized in the Act, the FAA must recruit, train, and retain the best and brightest for our FAA team. The Act specifically considers both Air Traffic Controller staffing[10] and Aviation Safety Inspector (ASI) staffing.[11]

Controller staffing is a top priority as air traffic controllers play an essential role in keeping the American people safe. As required by the Act, we are updating controller staffing targets across facilities to reflect FAA-NATCA workgroup negotiated levels until we make adjustments to our controller staffing model.

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[8] *Id.,* § 817.
[9] *Id.,* § 818.
[10] *Id., §* 437.
[11] *See id.,* §§ 428, 430.

We currently have over 10,750 air traffic controllers on the job, with more than 3,000 in training. We are on track to hire another 2,000 controller trainees this year. We are reviewing our hiring, training, and placement processes, as well as FAA Academy withdrawals and failures, to ensure our selection methods effectively identify candidates best suited for the controller profession.

Consistent with Secretary Duffy's announcement on supercharged air traffic controller hiring and our commitment to enhancing efficiency, we streamlined the hiring process through targeted automation and process improvements, 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 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.

Under Secretary Duffy's leadership, we are also offering financial incentives to new FAA controllers who complete initial qualification training. Additional financial incentives are also available to retain our most experienced controllers, and we are expanding opportunities for experienced military controllers to join the workforce using on-the-spot hiring authority to allow these veterans to bypass the normal announcement process. Air Traffic managers will be able to directly accept resumes from interested military controllers and help place them at their preferred location.

In addition to financial incentives, we are also leveraging partnerships with approved colleges and universities to create an additional pipeline for controllers through the Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative (AT-CTI). The Enhanced AT-CTI authorizes institutions to provide the same training provided by the FAA. After passing the Air Traffic Skills Assessment, meeting the FAA's medical and security requirements, passing performance evaluations, and

receiving an endorsement certificate, Enhanced AT-CTI graduates can report directly to an FAA facility to begin their on-the-job training.

The benefits of the many investments in controller training and hiring will not be limited to just FAA facilities. We also expect these investments to assist staffing at critical Federal Contract Towers as we grow the controller workforce.

ASI hiring is also essential to our ability to execute our safety mission. ASIs are the frontline in safety oversight. Congressional direction for the FAA to use direct-hire authority (e.g., on-the-spot hiring authority) has enabled the FAA to continue targeted recruitment for these mission-critical positions, and it allows the FAA to accept resumes outside of the normal announcement process for all service locations. Use of on-the-spot hiring authority is an effective tool in hiring ASI positions. On-the-spot hiring authority will continue to enable the FAA to accelerate the hiring process by extending offers of employment to fully mission-qualified candidates faster in a highly competitive labor market.

**Airports**

Our nation's airports are vital to connecting communities, sustaining jobs, and moving people and goods where they need to go. The FAA appreciates the increase in the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) authorization to $4 billion for fiscal years 2025 through 2028 to invest in airports across the country so that communities, large and small, can continue to safely and efficiently connect with the rest of the world.[12] AIP grants support projects that improve safety and efficiency and keep the pavement of our nation's airports in good, safe condition for pilots and the flying public; preserve and improve critical airfield infrastructure at more than 3,200 public-use airports nationwide to support a continued focus on safety-related development

[12] *Id.,* § 101.

projects; and facilitate the safe and efficient integration of new and innovative technologies into airport operations.

We're also working hard to implement other requirements, such as updating AIP guidance that will benefit airport operators[13], continuing to support the transition to fluorine-free firefighting foam[14], and updating guidance for vertiports[15], which will support future integration of AAM.

**Runway Safety**

Runway safety remains one of our highest priorities. We made substantial progress in implementing section 347 of the Act, which expresses our shared intent with Congress to eliminate all dangerous runway incidents. In November 2024, the Air Traffic Organization briefed the Runway Safety Council on airport surface safety technologies. The council identified the Surface Awareness Initiative as an additional tool that expands surface situational awareness for controllers at 18 airports without existing surface surveillance capabilities. Since the briefing in November 2024, all 18 sites are operational, with more than 30 additional sites planned to go operational by the end of calendar year 2025. In addition, we announced that we are rolling out new enhanced safety technology at more than 70 airports. Runway Incursion Devices are memory aids for air traffic controllers that indicate when a runway is occupied or closed. Runway Incursion Devices are one of three situational-awareness solutions in the FAA's fast-tracked surface safety portfolio.

[13] *See id.,* §§ 733 and 737.
[14] *See id.,* § 767.
[15] *Id.,* § 958.

**Conclusion**

The FAA is committed to implementing the provisions of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. Our employees work hard to achieve the goals and directives mandated by Congress in the Act. We are confident that we are making substantial and meaningful progress, and we intend to keep Congress apprised of that progress regularly. Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee. We look forward to answering your questions.

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