



Association of Professional Flight Attendants
Office of the National President

April 21, 2020

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA), representing more than 27,000 Flight Attendants of American Airlines. First, thank you for your steadfast support for Flight Attendants and all aviation workers over the past weeks in our fight for fair treatment under the CARES Act. Without federal assistance, the entire commercial aviation industry would be irreparably damaged, and thousands of aviation employees would bear the brunt of the industry's collapse. We are proud to see the CARES Act directly assist aviation workers. The payroll support provided to the airline industry will keep our companies solvent and our jobs secure during this uncertain time.

In addition, I would like to update you on some of the critical issues that APFA members and all Flight Attendants are up against, as well as ways we can and should protect the safety of crewmembers and the flying public. We are all aware of how the aviation industry could operate as a vector for COVID-19, so we are grateful for your dedication and collaboration in slowing the spread of the virus.

Safety Concerns

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As safety professionals, Flight Attendants have sounded the alarm on the coronavirus since January. We are on the frontlines and in contact with hundreds of people in a single workday. At an absolute minimum, we must be provided with adequate equipment, procedures, and protections to minimize the risk of infection for our crewmembers, passengers, and our families. Our members need approximately 800,000 masks each month to work safely, and we commend American Airlines for beginning to provision surgical masks and hand sanitizer. But this is something for which we should have never had to fight. We continue to advocate that our satellite bases and co-terminals also be provisioned with this PPE immediately so that all crew members have access to them. Every airline should have an obligation to ensure that every single crewmember has this PPE.

However, it is now time that industry also begins requiring that every passenger on every flight wear a mask. Anyone who steps on an airplane should take up this practice lest we risk spreading the virus further. These are precautions that must be taken. If we are honest, we all know that without these commonsense steps, our industry will not fully recover.

2. *Aircraft Cleaning*

Furthermore, all air carriers must redouble their cleaning and sanitizing efforts on every plane after every flight. Fast turnarounds are irrelevant today. What counts is that the aircraft are sanitized and safe for passengers and crew. For these reasons, we welcomed the FAA's decision to modify the safety demonstrations of oxygen masks and life vests which were not receiving proper sanitation after each use. But while the company tells us certain cabin sanitizations are happening between every flight, our members are reporting to me that they are not. It is becoming clear to APFA that without intervention from Congress, our planes will continue to fly across the country while inadequately sanitized and possibly spread the virus unnecessarily.

3. *Social Distancing*

We are also glad to see that the FAA issued new jumpseat guidance that allows Flight Attendants to sit spaced out throughout the cabin. This new policy will help minimize our chances of exposure and help slow the spread of new infections, but we can and must do more to mitigate the risk. We need a uniform seating policy across all airlines that keeps passengers and Flight Attendants socially distanced from each other, as recommended by both the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization. Blocking some middle seats is not enough. American Airlines has also told us that they will not modify aircraft boarding procedures to increase social distancing. Crewmembers will continue to be unnecessarily exposed until our company is made to act.

Flight Attendants are also concerned that as airlines drastically reduce their flight schedules, the remaining flights will become more crowded. Legislators and regulators must guarantee that all airlines are held to a safe standard that keeps flights from becoming booked to the point where safe distancing is impossible. Furthermore, we acknowledge that some citizens have essential reasons to be traveling, but we are dismayed to see some customers who are simply abusing the availability of \$20 fares. These fares put everyone at unnecessary risk.

4. *Contact Tracing and Notification*

Contact tracing must be practiced to end the pandemic. In the absence of a vaccine, APFA and all other transportation unions must be made aware of when other crewmembers or passengers have been exposed to or have tested positive for COVID-19. We must know the flight number, date, names of crew members, and receive a confirmation that those crewmembers have been notified. This is information our Unions need from our airlines to prevent further infection. Despite privacy concerns surrounding this information, I believe we can create a system that keeps medical information private while still notifying everyone who needs to be informed so that a critical self-quarantine may take place.

American Airlines has done the right thing in providing us with two-week "pandemic pay" to allow for self-quarantine if we become infected. Since Flight Attendants are considered essential employees, we are required to report for work. Due to our company's punitive attendance policy, our members are afraid to call in sick and instead go to work out of fear of disciplinary action, potentially spreading the virus to their coworkers and passengers. Our industry is currently overstaffed, so there is no reason why even potentially sick Flight Attendants should leave their homes. There ought to be no considerations other than public safety when deciding if we are fit to come to work. While testing is scarce, we must take these proper precautions to curb the spread of the virus.

5. *Access to COVID-19 Testing*

Public health experts have warned us that the threat of coronavirus will continue even when we pass the “peak” of new infections. To prepare for our nation’s recovery, we will have to ensure that transportation is safe and does not become the vector that leads to a new wave of the pandemic. To this end, accurate and quick coronavirus tests need to be secured for crewmembers, who, by the very nature of our jobs, come in contact with hundreds of people in airports and airplanes each week. We recognize that testing capacity is stretched thin right now. In the interim, our company will begin temperature testing its employees upon entering the airport. Still, as testing production is ramped up and economic activity slowly resumes, COVID-19 testing must be prioritized for essential workers who frequently interact with people as part of the vital services they provide. Flight Attendants are aviation’s first responders and if the traveling public is not confident that the flight crew is healthy, the demand for air travel will lag.

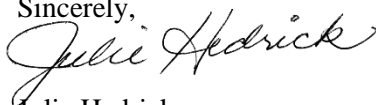
Hazard Pay

Hundreds of our members have tested positive for the virus, and we know this number continues to grow. Many more may have the virus but are asymptomatic and go untested due to the testing shortage. Tragically, two of our members have passed away from this disease. Under the current circumstances, Flight Attendants worry that every time we step on an airplane, we are putting ourselves, our families, and the flying public at risk. As safety professionals, we take this very seriously. We thank the lawmakers who boldly proposed the “Heroes Fund” to provide compensation to frontline workers who are maintaining essential services in the face of the ongoing threat of COVID-19. This is the right thing to do, and I urge you to ensure that Flight Attendants are included in this legislation, along with other transportation workers, as we continue to put ourselves at risk every day, on every flight.

We cannot isolate at home. We are doing our best to maintain distance between ourselves, our coworkers, and our passengers, but there is only so much space in a cramped aircraft cabin. Flight Attendants are frontline essential workers and should be compensated for our role. We are proud to play our part in helping curb this pandemic. We accept the risk involved in transporting critical goods and emergency personnel to hot zones, but it should be acknowledged. Hazard pay must reflect the hours we have flown while potentially in harm's way. As Congress considers the "Heroes Fund," these considerations have to be made for Flight Attendants.

The 27,000 members of APFA thank you for your work already done to keep the aviation industry moving, and we implore you to remember Flight Attendants as you look toward the future. APFA is committed to advocating for our workers and protecting the safety of our passengers who trust American Airlines to transport them safely. I am available to you and your staff if you have any questions about the challenges Flight Attendants face and how our policies can make air travel safer in these uncertain times.

Sincerely,



Julie Hedrick
National President
Association of Professional Flight Attendants