



Association of Professional Flight Attendants

*Proudly Representing the **Flight Attendants** of American Airlines*

Office of the President

February 8, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Secretary Buttigieg:

First, a huge congratulations and a warm welcome from the Association of Professional Flight Attendants. We know that your leadership will positively impact the working men and women who keep our nation's transportation moving. APFA is the largest independent Flight Attendant Union representing the 24,000 Flight Attendants of American Airlines. Thank you for meeting with aviation unions last week. Your openness to working with labor leaders is a welcome change. I imagine that you are just as eager to get to work as we are, so I would like to reiterate some of the challenges that Flight Attendants are facing right now.

Payroll Support Program

This past year has been the most challenging for us in the history of American aviation. The pandemic took a devastating toll on our airline and our Flight Attendants. Fortunately, our industry is heavily Unionized, and with our Labor partners, we were successful in passing workers-first legislation in the form of the Payroll Support Program (PSP). This was vital for airline employees as it mandated that frontline workers stay connected to wages and healthcare benefits – NO furloughs. Unlike previous aid to the airline industry, the PSP ensured these payroll grants passed through directly and exclusively to aviation workers.

Despite broad bipartisan and bicameral support, the PSP lapsed for nearly three months, beginning in October. Tens of thousands of U.S. aviation workers lost their jobs and health insurance amidst a global pandemic. In the December emergency relief package, Congress extended the PSP retroactive to December 1st, securing our jobs through March 31st, 2021. But the near three-month furlough led to certification lapses, loss of security credentials, and created a backlog of training- challenges that can all be avoided if Congress acts now to continue what is arguably the most successful jobs program in history.

It is becoming clear that a few more months of assistance will be necessary to guide us through this crisis. All of the successful PSP provisions need to continue, including full furlough protections, no cuts to hourly rates of pay, continued air service to all communities, extensions on the executive compensation cap, and the ban on stock buybacks and dividends.

Safety and COVID-19 Vaccine

We can all see how the aviation industry could potentially operate as a vector for COVID-19. The health and safety of our crewmembers and our passengers remain our highest priority. To that end, APFA had an active role in urging our airline to quickly adapt with safety precautions, including mask policies, access to PPE, airplane sanitization, social distancing, contact tracing and notification, and an amended sick policy. We thank the Biden Administration for issuing the executive order on mandatory masks on his second day in office. We are hopeful that this will provide the industry-wide consistency and passenger expectations that we genuinely need.

What we are still up against, however, is securing access to the vaccine. As essential frontline workers and safety professionals, our jobs require that we interact with hundreds of people in airplanes and airports in a single workday. Our flight crews take off, land, and layover at airports all over the country. But due to variances of state-level vaccine distribution, our members' ability to get vaccinated widely differs. Anything you can do to help us stay included in the Tier 1B essential worker category for distribution, as recommended by experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), would be of great help and comfort to our members, who have been out on the frontlines since the beginning.

We are looking forward to widespread vaccine access for Flight Attendants so that our industry can lead the coming national economic recovery. Until then, vaccinating Flight Attendants will help ensure that the virus does not spread unnecessarily through our profession's travel requirements.

No-Fly Lists

In recent years, Flight Attendants have witnessed increased incidents of unruly passengers inflight. It is one of several issues we would like to tackle with you in the coming years. Although these incidents are unacceptable, we do have some procedures for how to handle them. However, we were surprised, unprepared, and shocked by recent incidents occurring on our planes before and after January 6, 2021. Never before had we encountered politically-motivated, mob-like behavior. We transported many passengers who had participated in the January 6 insurrection and received reports of far too many incidents that made our crewmembers and other passengers feel unsafe. We thank FAA Administrator Dickson for his action in advance of the Presidential inauguration to strengthen the FAA's policy against this behavior. It is a simple expectation for passengers to exhibit appropriate behavior, and those who choose to act outside of this expectation need to face substantial consequences from the FAA. In the past, legal enforcement of FAA penalties has been sporadic at best. We see no reason why this commonsense policy of immediate legal enforcement should not remain in place beyond March 30.

Furthermore, APFA strongly believes that those charged with crimes in relation to the riot of January 6 should be added to the DHS Terrorist Watchlist. We support each airline's decision to add these people to their no-fly lists; however, we lack transparency on these lists from a government and Union perspective.

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How many people have been added? How long do they stay on the list? How do they get off? How can we ensure that a passenger banned from one airline is not re-accommodated on another? We must be able to answer these questions and be better prepared for these types of incidents in the future, and we are looking forward to working with you and DHS to prevent them.

Aviation Safety Issues

Before March 2020, APFA focused its energy on several ongoing aviation safety issues. These included seat size and timely evacuations, cabin air quality, minimum rest requirements, and emotional support animals. We were pleased to see a positive rulemaking on emotional support animals come out of the DOT this past December. It was a long hard fight for a commonsense approach.

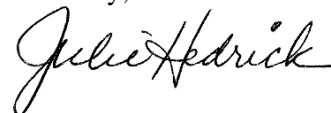
We were also glad to see the Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) conduct a study on minimum seat size and pitch, as directed by the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Bill. The intent was to assure that Flight Attendants could still meet the 90-second aircraft emergency evacuation standard, despite shrinking seat sizes and configurations. Unfortunately, the results of the study seem to have been concealed. Even Chairman DeFazio's request for details was ignored. However, we found out that the test population used in this study was not realistic or representative of the passengers we transport. Young children, the elderly, the obese, and those with disabilities were not included in the testing, nor was our Union or any Union permitted to observe the study.

Finally, despite the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Bill's clear intent, a rulemaking process on 10-hour minimum rest for Flight Attendants still hangs in limbo with the DOT and has for over two years now. We are hopeful that we can expedite this rulemaking through your leadership so that our safety professionals can be guaranteed adequate rest between duty periods, which can put us on the clock for up to 16 hours for domestic flying. Fatigue is the enemy of safety.

Of course, our industry is no stranger to crisis. In the last few years, APFA weighed in heavily to ending the 35-day government shutdown. We were engaged in the process of ensuring that tragedies like the Boeing 737 MAX crashes never occur again. Additionally, many of our members were active Flight Attendants when 9/11 changed our industry forever.

We are excited to work with you as you face the many challenges of our industry. Do not hesitate to lean on us if we can help on the many aviation issues that lie ahead.

Sincerely,



Julie Hedrick
National President
Association of Professional Flight Attendants