

**United States House of Representatives
Transportation and Infrastructure
Aviation Subcommittee Hearing**

Thursday, September 23rd, 2021

***Disruption in the Skies: The Surge in Air Rage
and its Effects on Workers, Airlines, and Airports***



**Testimony of
Teddy Andrews**

**Flight Attendant
Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA)**

Association of Professional Flight Attendants
1004 West Euless Boulevard, Euless, Texas 76040
Government Affairs Representative Allie Malis 703-307-3488

Good morning, Chairman DeFazio, Chairman Larsen, Ranking Member Graves, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Teddy Andrews. I am a Charlotte-based Flight Attendant and have been flying with American Airlines for ten years. My career within the airline industry began in 1981, and since then, I have held numerous positions, including gate agent, Flight Attendant trainer, and customer service instructor.

I am honored to be representing my Union, the Association of Professional Flight Attendants, and my 25,000 colleagues to discuss the most significant challenge and daily danger facing Flight Attendants right now. Air rage has reached unprecedented levels. Disrespect, threats, verbal abuse, and even physical assault directed at flight crew have sadly become all too common. I thank this Committee for their commitment to the safety of Flight Attendants and for holding this hearing to help prevent future incidents from occurring.

At this point, I have lost count of the times I have been insulted or threatened on a flight simply for doing my job. The specific incident that I will share with you today is not easy for me to talk about. What should have been a routine domestic flight made me question my career choice.

On this flight, my crew had just completed our service and was collecting trash and performing the required compliance checks. My colleague, on the verge of tears, came to the back galley and told me that she was having trouble with a passenger who was not wearing a mask. The passenger was deliberately not complying with the mask policy and was giving her a hard time. I offered to help, as any fellow crewmember would.

I left the galley to speak with the passenger, who still had his mask off but was not eating or drinking. As I approached him, I asked politely, "Sir, would you please put your mask back on? It needs to be covering both your mouth and nose."

He looked at me, and here I will not repeat the vile epithet he used. He said, "N*****, I don't have to listen to a damn thing you say, this is a free country." I was completely taken aback. I didn't know what to say. Then he continued, "You heard me, N***** boy."

I paused for a moment. While I am trained for this, I know I don't deserve to be spoken to like this under any circumstance. Finally, I replied, "Sir, regardless of your thoughts, comments, or opinions, there is a mask requirement onboard our aircraft, and failure to comply could restrict your ability to fly with us in the future. We would not want that to happen, so, sir, please do what we're asking of you. Put your mask on and keep it on this flight."

He went on saying, "You nor the Government can control me, and you are nothing but [damn] mask police. This entire virus thing is a big fake." To this I calmly answered, "If you can't do it for yourself, would you please do it for your family, who I am sure loves you very much and would be devastated if something were to happen to you. Please do it for your fellow passengers as well."

He eventually calmed down and put his mask on. I advised the captain of the disturbance who asked whether law enforcement was needed to meet our aircraft, but we landed safely with no further issues.

This pandemic has been amongst the most trying and tumultuous times to work in the airline industry. I, myself, have a very personal experience with this virus. Early in the pandemic, in March of 2020, I nearly died.

Upon returning from an assignment in Chile, I started experiencing aches, chills, night sweats, coughing, and vomiting. I was tested at Urgent Care and the next day the Department of Health and Human Services informed me I was positive for COVID-19. I was placed on a 14-day in-home quarantine and sent a letter that said if I left my home for any reason, I was subject to a \$2,000 fine and up to two years in jail.

That week, my condition deteriorated. I was admitted to the ER with a fever of 104.5 and an oxygen level of 88%. My daughter, on her 24th birthday, was called and told that it would be a miracle if I made it through the night. Intubation forms and DNR forms needed to be signed.

But after ten days in the ICU, I stabilized. My recovery took months. I was not able to work from March until September 2020. I could barely walk across the room without oxygen. Today, I'm still recovering from chronic headaches. But against the odds, I am here, and I can work at the job I love again.

However, the environment I have come back to has changed entirely, and the incident I shared is not unique to my colleagues or me. We have been insulted by passengers in different ways and on many separate occasions, simply for adhering to our responsibilities.

When I fly, I, too, must wear a mask for hours on end because it is part of my job. I fully understand that it is not always pleasant to wear. But I also know, on both personal and professional levels, what is at stake if we don't utilize all available safety precautions to beat this pandemic.

This virus has taken a tremendous toll on the airline industry. Flight Attendants were deemed essential frontline workers. We came to work when everyone else was told to stay home. Then, when the demand for air travel dropped off steeply, we worried about our job security. We have Congress and the leadership of this Committee to thank for passing the Payroll Support Program and saving our jobs, our healthcare, and our industry during this pandemic. I cringe to think what would have happened to me in the ICU had I lost my health insurance.

Now, Flight Attendants are in a third phase of this crisis, worried and anxious about our safety simply by coming to work and fulfilling our job responsibilities. Flight Attendants have been offered voluntary self-defense training which was first introduced after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Today, we find ourselves in an environment where we may need to employ these skills. The problem that must be solved is how we can prevent these situations from escalating to that point.

This type of environment makes it difficult for Flight Attendants to perform our duties as safety professionals. Medical emergencies, onboard fires, security threats, and emergency evacuations are all situations in which we are prepared to encounter every time we come to work. But now our most immediate danger, and our biggest distraction, is the number of incidents we find ourselves having to deescalate. I believe that passengers who so willfully cause disruptions, who show no regard for our policies and personnel, put all others in danger.

These days I come to work expecting some form of disrespect or air rage. It feels like Flight Attendants have become the target for all kinds of frustrations that some people are feeling. Sometimes it happens when passengers disagree with airline or federal policies. At times passengers are emboldened by alcohol. But above all, everyday Flight Attendants are not being respected for the job that we are here and trained to do.

My colleagues are anxious. What is going to happen on the next flight? How will this passenger react if I remind them to wear their mask? Will complying with airline policies set them off? Can I avoid engaging, or would that be an evasion of my duties? This is now our constant fear.

I know many of you on this Committee travel each week and personally understand the challenges of air travel today. We cannot combat this issue without solid coordination at the federal level. We must ensure that passengers have clear expectations and consequences for their behavior in flight. One more air rage event—one more Flight Attendant who is singled out, threatened, or assaulted—is one too many.

Protecting ourselves from unruly passengers has become the top issue for our Union this year. Successfully deterring this behavior will require full coordination between all aviation, airport, and government stakeholders. Everyone has a part to play. Here are some initiatives that our Union supports.

1. Establishment of a federal “no-fly” list for disruptive passengers
2. Full enforcement of civil penalties/fines, no settlements
3. Federal criminal prosecution where it applies
4. Public identification of passengers who have verbally/physically assaulted crewmembers
5. Creation of a public campaign on behavior/consequences funded through assessed fines
6. Confiscation of all alcohol through TSA
7. Discontinuation of to-go alcohol and shots in airports
8. Increased police and security presence in airports
9. Increased monitoring of passengers through the airport, TSA, and prior to boarding
10. Consistent enforcement of the mask mandate throughout the airport and security
11. Inclusion of updated de-escalation and TSA self-defense training for Flight Attendants at annual requalification training

Thank you for the work you do to help keep my colleagues safe. My testimony is now complete.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Teddy Andrews".

Teddy Andrews

Flight Attendant - Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA)