United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2026

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Bedford:

We are concerned about the critical safety standards that help passengers survive when an emergency evacuation of an aircraft becomes necessary. As we eagerly await the implementation of Section 365 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-63), commonly referred to as the *EVAC Act*, it has been brought to our attention that several major U.S. carriers are now operating dual-aisle aircraft without a certified Flight Attendant at every floor-level exit. We are requesting that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) provide a status update on the implementation of Section 365 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. Separately, we urge the FAA to examine the impact of revised minimum crew requirements on the efficiency of emergency evacuations.

Section 365 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 requires the FAA to examine the changing attributes of the modern-day flying public, including age, height, weight, ability level, language skills, carry-on luggage, seat size, passenger space, aircraft configuration, pets and service animals, among other factors. Past emergency evacuations show that factors such as these have affected efficiency. The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 required the study on improvements to evacuation standards be completed by May 16, 2025. Almost two years after enactment, the report is still not complete

Separately, 14 CFR Part 121.391 mandates safety standards for evacuating an aircraft within 90 seconds. This standard is not arbitrary—it is based on the harsh reality that seconds can be the difference between life and death. Despite the importance of efficient evacuations, a September 2020 Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General investigation concluded that the FAA, "has not conducted sufficient research on passenger behaviors—such as evacuations with carry-on bags and the presence of emotional support animals—and seat dimensions to show how they affect evacuation standards."

Dynamics impacting emergency evacuations continue to evolve, including the decision by major U.S. carriers to operate dual-aisle aircraft without a certified Flight Attendant at every floor-level exit. In a dual-aisle aircraft, the fuselage is wide enough to accommodate two aisles with passenger seats arranged in multiple columns, ranging from six to ten seats across in the economy section. These aircraft frequently carry more than 200 passengers. While reducing the number of crewmembers may technically satisfy 14 CFR Part 121.391, which requires one Flight Attendant per 50 passenger seats, it violates the purpose of evacuation certification and creates a dangerous gap in safety.

Reducing the minimum crew requirement means that a single Flight Attendant is solely responsible for operating two doors, up to 19 feet apart. This means one Flight Attendant could be responsible for evacuating hundreds of passengers across two aisles and middle column seats. Without a certified Flight Attendant positioned at every dual-aisle floor-level exit, passengers could be left vulnerable at precisely the moment they must rely on skilled, decisive guidance and rapid action from highly trained and certified Flight Attendants. Furthermore, reduced staffing poses additional risk in the unfortunate event that a Flight Attendant is left incapacitated during a serious incident. The minimum crew reduction on dual-aisle aircraft has been adopted by Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and, most recently, American Airlines.

The certification of the Boeing 787 was done using an analysis of earlier dual-aisle aircraft models, meaning it never underwent full, in-person evacuation testing to prove it could be safely evacuated in 90 seconds. The previous analysis also does not account for the realities of today's flying public, which increasingly includes older adults, people with disabilities, families traveling with young children, and record passenger load factors. Therefore, it seems risky to assume the aircraft could be evacuated without adequate staffing.

We urge the FAA to complete the study mandated by Section 365 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 to examine the attributes of today's traveling public. Given recent concerns, we ask that the FAA separately study the impact of minimum crew requirements and crew placement in relation to floor-level exits on evacuation efficiency, particularly on dual-aisle aircraft, including examination of following:

1. The impact of not having a certified Flight Attendant stationed at every floor-level exit
2. The potential impact of passengers operating floor-level exits on dual-aisle aircraft
3. The impact of incapacitated Flight Attendant(s) on the efficiency of an evacuation
4. The impact of current aircraft configuration and design on evacuation efficiency
5. The impact of requiring a Flight Attendant to establish evacuation flow on a dual-aisle aircraft at the primary door, cross a crowded galley or aisle to an additional door and continue the evacuation
6. The current Flight Attendant hands-on training and procedures for evacuating multiple floor-level exits on dual-aisle aircraft.

Passengers and crewmembers trust the FAA to ensure that the minimum crew requirements adequately address their safety during emergency evacuation, as well as in other emergencies, such as onboard fires, medical emergencies, or security threats. Past evacuation incidents reinforce what we have learned from real-world experience: The presence of Flight Attendants, stationed in the right locations, help passengers survive when their lives depend on it. Appropriate crew staffing is not a luxury; it is a life-saving necessity.

We encourage the FAA to complete the study required by Section 365 and build on the findings by examining additional evacuation factors to ensure the highest integrity of our aviation safety standards.

Sincerely,

Tammy Duckworth
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation,
Space and Innovation
Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science and
Transportation

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator