



March 4, 2023

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Cruz:

During the recent nomination hearing for Phillip A. Washington, CEO of the Denver International Airport, to be administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), I was dismayed at hearing several members of the committee question whether and how airport directors contribute to aviation safety. I would like to set the record straight on the important role airport directors all across the country play every day in ensuring the continued safety of passengers, employees, aircraft, and facilities within the U.S. aviation system.

Airports – and the directors that lead them – play crucial roles in aviation safety, as evidenced by tens of billions of dollars of dedicated airport investments in safety projects. From multibillion dollar investments in runway safety areas, airfield lighting systems, runway incursion mitigations, to involvement in local runway safety action teams and the safe execution of multi-billion dollar capital projects, airport commitments to safety are unequivocal.

In light of the statutory requirement that the FAA administrator “have experience in a field directly related to aviation,” I will submit that airport directors have extensive knowledge and experience in aviation, particularly as it relates to safety. Their knowledge, experience, and leadership in managing complex operations at hundreds of airports around the country is crucial for the United States to maintain the safest air transportation system in the world.

Federal law – through 14 CFR Part 139 – requires the FAA to issue airport operating certificates to airports in order to ensure safety in air transportation. To obtain a certificate, an airport must agree to certain operational and safety standards and host an annual inspection by the FAA. The airport director is ultimately responsible for ensuring his or her airport remains in full compliance with all aspects of safety. A sample of the various operational and safety FAA requirements that airports must follow include:

- AC 150/5200-30, Airport Winter Safety and Operations
- AC 150/5200-31, Airport Emergency Plan
- AC 150/5200-18, Airport Safety Self-Inspection
- AC 150/5200-33, Hazardous Wildlife Attractants On or Near Airports

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- AC 150/5200-28, Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) for Airport Operators
- AC 150/5210-20, Ground Vehicle Operations on Airports
- AC 150/5340-1, Standards for Airport Markings
- AC 150/5340-18, Standards for Airport Sign Systems
- AC 150/5370-2, Operational Safety on Airports During Construction

Airport directors are responsible for the safety of aircraft operations at the airport, including the safety of all movement areas, the conduct of aircraft rescue and firefighting operations, and all aeronautical fueling operations and facilities. In addition to complying with all of the FAA's standards and inspections, airports also must stay updated on changes to FAA Advisory Circulars and Certification Alerts (CertAlerts), which routinely place new federal requirements on airports. In just the past year, these changes have included:

- new requirements that airports design and implement safety management systems;
- new standards for fluorine-free aircraft firefighting foam;
- new standards for runway, taxiway, heliport, and vertiport light fixtures;
- updates on de-icing products;
- updates on movement area training and situational awareness;
- updates on collecting and reporting on wildlife strikes with aircraft;
- updates on the inspection and maintenance of in-pavement equipment;
- updates on the protection and operation of navigational aids; and
- updates on the detection of foreign object debris on movement areas.

Beyond the runway, airport directors and their dedicated staff address an array of safety and operational issues in the airspace that feeds their facilities with their airline partners, business and general aviation users, and the FAA Air Traffic Organization. They also have to coordinate directly with FAA's Technical Operations professionals to ensure airfield lighting systems and navigational aids are functional and safely meeting the needs of airport users.

On top of all these FAA safety requirements, airports also must remain in compliance with security requirements imposed by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). As such, airport operators generally are in charge of maintaining security-restricted areas and mitigating or addressing security risks to people and property throughout their facilities.

I appreciate this opportunity to share with you a more detailed picture of the significant safety and security work carried out by hard-working and dedicated airport directors each and every day. These airport professionals do their part and more to ensure the United States has the safest air transportation system in the world.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Burke
President and CEO
Airports Council International – North America