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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

LILA HARPER HELMS, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR  
BRAD GRANTZ, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

February 16, 2023

Mr. Andrew Watterson  
Chief Operating Officer  
Southwest Airlines  
2702 Love Field Drive  
HDQ-1PR  
Dallas, TX 75235

Dear Mr. Watterson:

Thank you for testifying on February 9, 2023, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Science, Commerce, and Transportation about the root cause of Southwest Airlines' travel debacle in December 2022 and the actions the airline has taken to remedy the problem and consequences.

At the hearing, I asked how many tickets Southwest actually cancelled and you did not provide a clear answer. I also asked how many people actually received refunds and also did not get a clear answer. The Committee deserves clarity on these questions, in light of the fact that on February 3, 2023, Southwest told Committee staff that the airline had "processed" 99.5% of refund requests.

We also learned at the oversight hearing that passengers are facing too many hurdles in obtaining refunds and accessing information from airlines when airlines cancel their flights. Clarifying the rules for refunds and simplifying the process for receiving a refund are among the common-sense reforms we are considering for Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization.

To further educate the Committee in furtherance of these goals, please provide answers to the following questions with precise answers and actual numbers, as applicable. You may also provide percentages, where appropriate, for additional context.

1. Due to Winter Storm Elliott, Southwest's loss of operational control, and subsequent decision to reboot its network, how many Southwest passengers were subjected to a cancelled or significantly delayed flight—the threshold for refund entitlement during DOT policy<sup>1</sup>—or were otherwise eligible for a refund under either DOT policy or Southwest's own standards? Please provide data for, at a minimum, December 21 through December 30.

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<sup>1</sup> "Refunds," U.S. Department of Transportation, Updated as of May 3, 2022, *available at*: <https://www.transportation.gov/individuals/aviation-consumer-protection/refunds>.

2. Of that amount:
  - a. How many passengers actually requested a refund?
  - b. How many passengers did you refund, and what is the total value of those refunds?
  - c. Instead of a refund, how many passengers proactively accepted a voucher or credit?<sup>2</sup>
  - d. Instead of a refund, how many passengers re-booked on Southwest?<sup>3</sup>
3. Of the refund requests that Southwest has completed, how many were completed *after* DOT's seven business day deadline?<sup>4</sup>
4. For any passengers who were subjected to a canceled or significantly delayed flight due to Winter Storm Elliott and/or Southwest's subsequent decision to reboot its network, but who did not pursue a refund, voucher, credit, or re-booking, what steps is Southwest taking to ensure that they are made whole?
5. Regarding reimbursements for out-of-pocket expenses, last week you told the Committee that 284,188 "eligible cases" had been submitted to Southwest, and that Southwest has sent reimbursements for all but the 10,782 most recently-made requests. How many claims did Southwest deem to be ineligible for reimbursement?
6. Please provide a detailed explanation of Southwest's criteria for determining the eligibility of a reimbursement request.
7. You testified that the "fix" to the crew scheduling system would be done the day following the hearing. Please confirm whether this fix is complete. If not, please provide the date when the crew scheduling system will be fixed.

Thank you for your timely response to these questions. Please provide a response in writing to my staff by February 23, 2023.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell  
Chair

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *See* 14 C.F.R. § 259.5; 14 C.F.R. § 374.3(b); 12 C.F.R. § 1026.11(a)(2).