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Oral Testimony before the
U.S. House Aviation Subcommittee Hearing on
“FAA Reauthorization: Examining the Current and Future Challenges
Facing the Aerospace Workforce”
April 19, 2023, 10:00 a.m. ET

As Prepared for Delivery

Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chair Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to offer my view on behalf of the more than 67,000 pilots of the Air Line Pilots Association, International.

I’d like to thank this committee for its bold action in 2020 to pass the Payroll Support Program. It prevented the collapse of the airline industry and saved American jobs. Your work guaranteed that this country would have enough pilots during the pandemic and could respond to demand-driven growth when recovery came. Thanks to you, the United States has more than enough pilots *and* the safest skies in the world.

A decade earlier, this committee also came together in a bipartisan effort to take on a crisis in our industry: a series of fatal airline accidents, the last of which occurred near Buffalo, New York, in 2009. I’m honored that the families of those who lost loved ones on that flight and on the ground are represented here today.

In response to the more than 1,100 lives lost in U.S. airline accidents in the 20 years prior to 2010, Congress heeded investigators who found that inadequate pilot experience and training had contributed to the crashes. In the 2010 FAA bill, you established stronger pilot qualification, training, and experience requirements and made other aviation safety improvements. Since then, passenger fatalities have dropped by 99.8 percent. This year’s reauthorization should be based on retaining these provisions.

This pilot training framework has also produced tens of thousands more pilots over the past decade than airlines needed. The United States has certificated nearly 64,000 airline transport pilots since July 2013, while airlines have hired to fill approximately 40,000 positions.

In this context, airlines' decisions during COVID to bump pilots to smaller equipment, park aircraft, as well as furlough and put pilots on inactive status have created a training backlog. When demand—and subsequently growth—returned more quickly than some airlines anticipated, most of these pilots had to be retrained. Retraining is time intensive and expensive. It also relies on a training footprint that includes personnel and simulator devices and wasn't designed for a global pandemic.

Fortunately, we have more pilots available now than before the pandemic. As a result, the temporary training backlog is already resolving itself as airlines get caught up. Moreover, pilot training classes are at capacity, and college aviation programs are full.

With the recovery, and thanks to this committee's work, airlines are hiring pilots as companies expand market share and networks. As a result, new workers are performing new roles in an air transportation system that's already stressed and working to integrate new and expanding users. This is *no* time to weaken safety standards.

The current labor market is complicated by pilots moving among carriers as they leave airlines that offer less-attractive careers for those providing better pay and quality of life. Regional airlines have traditionally offered second-tier pay and work rules, and some would rather lower safety standards than pay pilots a living wage. This isn't how the United States became the gold standard in aviation safety, and it's predictable that pilots would pursue better opportunities.

Large passenger and cargo airlines have 7,500 more pilots today than before the pandemic, even when we account for pilots who change jobs multiple times. While encouraging, we shouldn't lose focus on continuing to expand the pilot pipeline.

In this year's FAA reauthorization, Congress should build on the strength of America's aviation workforce, maintain safety, and open the doors of opportunity for all those who aspire to fly by

- Providing student loans for appropriate flight training programs;
- Establishing grants to build flight training and education degree programs at minority-serving institutions;
- Increasing funding for the Workforce Development Grant Program; and
- Making the Women in Aviation Advisory Board a permanent body.

At the same time, we need a real dialogue about our nation's commitment to air service to small communities. I flew for a regional airline and am committed to ensuring that small and rural community passengers have access to safe and reliable air service; however, under deregulation airlines base service decisions on market demand.

ALPA stands ready to work with this committee to improve the Essential Air Service program. We support increasing the subsidy cap, enabling the regulator and airlines to adjust EAS payments when appropriate, and modifying airlines' frequency requirements. Actions like these, not weakening safety standards, will provide the air service rural communities need.

ALPA looks forward to collaborating with this committee to ensure this nation continues to have an abundant supply of airline pilots *and* lead the world in aviation safety. Thank you.