

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 15, 2018

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao,

We write to convey our concerns about extreme temperatures on commercial passenger aircraft, which can endanger the safety, health, and security of both airline passengers and crews.

Recent reports document several instances in which an aircraft's cabin and cockpit reached dangerous temperatures, exposing passengers and crew to potentially hazardous conditions. For example, in 2017, while a United Airlines flight was waiting to depart from Colorado, the temperature in the cabin reached dangerous levels, causing a four-month-old infant to overheat. Although flight attendants provided the mother with bags of ice to keep her child cool, the baby turned red, his eyes rolled back in his head, and he became limp. The flight was forced to return to the gate, where the child received emergency treatment from paramedics and was ultimately hospitalized.¹

Further, a petition recently submitted to the Department of Transportation (DOT) calling for temperature standards on aircraft, documents several other disturbing reports,² including:

- in June 2018, temperatures on board a flight exceeded 88 degrees while the plane was grounded for over two hours with a door open;
- in July 2018, temperatures on a seven hour and thirty minute flight fluctuated wildly, with business class temperatures plunging to 32 degrees Fahrenheit, excessive heat up to the exit rows, and colder conditions towards the back of the aircraft;³
- in July 2017, a passenger collapsed on board an overheating plane and had to be taken away by an ambulance and several other passengers had to seek medical care at the gate;
- in August 2014, a flight attendant reported passing out in a jump seat after an auxiliary power unit failed to cool the plane;
- in July 2014, the captain of an airplane reported that the temperature in his cockpit rarely went below 90 degrees during three flights in one day; and

¹ Kalhan Rosenblatt, *Colorado Infant Overheats Aboard Delayed United Airlines Flight*, NBC NEWS (June 27, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/airplane-mode/colorado-infant-overheats-aboard-delayed-united-airlines-flight-n777291>.

² *Association of Flight Attendants - CWA, AFL-CIO - Petition for Rulemaking*, REGULATIONS.GOV (July 6, 2018), <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=DOT-OST-2018-0097>.


³ Unpublished report from the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA

- in September 2013, extremely hot temperatures during three flights in one day caused a flight attendant to fall ill and another to vomit.⁴

Whenever passengers and crewmembers fasten their seatbelts, they are effectively captive to an aircraft's climate, with very little power to control the temperature. But that does not mean passengers and crew have no right to travel in safe and healthy environmental conditions. The DOT should establish reasonable standards to prevent future troubling temperature-related events and ensure that aircraft climate promotes safety, health, and security.

We support the efforts of flight crewmembers to ensure DOT takes action and urge you to initiate a rulemaking establishing standards for protecting aircraft passengers and crew from extreme temperatures while planes are on the ground and in the air. We respectfully request that you provide a written response to our letter by September 5, 2018, detailing what steps the Department will take to address this pressing issue.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

⁴ Bart Jansen, *Plane too hot? Too cold? Time for DOT to regulate, attendants say*, USA TODAY (Aug. 2, 2018), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/flights/todayinthesky/2018/08/01/flight-attendants-urge-dot-regulate-temperatures-flights/881299002>.