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The Honorable Krysten Sinema, Chairing

“Prepare for Takeoff: America’s Safe Return to Air Travel.”

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Testimony of
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Introduction

Thank you, Subcommittee Chair Sinema, Ranking Member Cruz, Full Committee Chair Cantwell, and Ranking Member Wicker, for this hearing on safe recovery of aviation as we navigate to end the pandemic. Members of the Committee, my name is Sara Nelson. I am a twenty-five year union flight attendant and president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO (AFA), representing 50,000 flight attendants across the industry. We appreciate the opportunity to testify today on the success of federal COVID relief efforts and the work we must do to support a safe return for air travel and build back better.

As frontline aviation workers, Flight Attendants were some of the first Americans to experience COVID-19 up close. With decades of experience in combating the spread of communicable disease, AFA first called on the administration to implement a coordinated, comprehensive plan to combat the virus more than 14 months ago. While the aviation sector is often called upon to support public health officials in preventing the spread of disease, our requests for leadership and attempts to coordinate with government went unanswered by the previous administration. We worked closely with our airlines and airports to implement procedures to mitigate risk, but a patchwork approach and inconsistent messaging from leadership made it difficult to do our jobs. In the year that followed, the pandemic has battered our economy, devastated the aviation industry world wide, and killed more than 565,000 Americans including fellow crewmembers and our families.

We are relieved that progress on combating the virus is finally underway. With the decisive leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration and 117th Congress, the U.S. just passed 200 million vaccine doses in arms and a quarter of all Americans, including many of our most vulnerable, are fully vaccinated. Flight Attendants are now eligible for vaccine appointments in every state, although we continue to advocate for prioritized access for aviation and other frontline workers, in addition to support from employers for the pay and time off necessary to obtain the vaccine and recover from any side effects. In recent weeks U.S. flight bookings have reached their highest levels in more than a year, although business and international travel is still essentially nonexistent. It is vital that we maintain vigilance and best public health practices to contain new surges in the virus and build on our hard won progress.

In many ways, our lives shrunk over the past year, into our homes and our immediate family, cut off from friends, family, extended networks, and the wider world. Our solutions have often been locally-focused, at the school-district, city, county, and state level. But rather than look inward for solutions, the pandemic shows we have to be world citizens. With coronavirus, for too long, we have been forced to play catch up. As we seek to build back stronger, we need to reassert our global leadership and reach for global solutions. To state the obvious, American aviation, and our international business and leisure travel, cannot recover while there are travel restrictions and viral surges across the globe. As a union leader, I have never uttered the labor adage, "an injury to one is an injury to all" with more somber truth. As long as the virus lives in any one of us in the world, all of us are at risk.

Today, I am pleased to share our perspective on the unprecedented and successful efforts of the federal government and, specifically, the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee, in acting to protect our jobs over the past year. Healthcare and economic security are inextricably linked and this Committee played a crucial role in giving us the strength to care for ourselves, our families, and our communities. We will also discuss our recommendations on how to ensure the health and safety of Americans returning to the skies, and how to build back stronger than before.

Payroll Support Program (PSP): A success for workers and a workers'-first model for the future

Flight Attendants and airline workers all across this country are deeply grateful to the members of this Committee and congressional leadership for acting decisively to save our jobs, with historic federal relief that puts working people first. Your actions have kept the people who make aviation fly on the job, on payroll, and connected to health care and benefits when nearly a million of us were at risk of layoffs and involuntary furloughs. By acting repeatedly to protect our jobs, you have kept our workforce intact and prepared to aid in the economic recovery now underway. You have averted untold financial harm, family disruption and anguish. We know that your leadership in successful, bipartisan, workers' first policy-making, is a model for the future across all sectors. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Members of this Committee joined together more than one year ago to pass an historic workers' first relief package for aviation workers. The result was the Payroll Support Program (PSP), the most successful jobs and infrastructure program in the CARES Act, extended in the 2020 year-end emergency covid relief and the American Rescue Plan (ARP). The diligent work of this Committee, and especially bipartisan leadership of Senators Cantwell, Sinema, and Wicker, revived PSP at the end of 2020 days before healthcare expired, rents were due, and just in time to begin a massive retraining process that will ensure we are fully prepared to meet the demand of an economy in recovery. PSP was designed with a single purpose: to keep aviation workers—passenger service agents, flight attendants, mechanics, caterers, pilots, dispatchers and all of the 2.1 million workers who make aviation possible —paid, connected to healthcare, out of the unemployment lines, and ready to lift the entire country.

This program used efficient systems already in place through airline payrolls, keeping benefits and payroll taxes in place, and maintaining the basis for retirement security both through government programs and company benefits. We continued paying taxes that supported the jobs we all count on through state and local budgets, like sanitation, firefighters, mass transit, education, and emergency response. At a time of great uncertainty for the industry, aviation workers had the stability to continue spending into the economy and the confidence that they and their family members would have access to healthcare in the middle of the pandemic. Fundamentally, PSP allowed us to take care of ourselves so that our country could focus on those who were sick or vulnerable, while also continuing to support the safety net programs we need well after this pandemic is over. It is well documented that the public receives an outsized return on all its investments to help aviation recover from COVID.¹

The program was also a model for how Congress can condition its spending to ensure accountability. PSP funding is authorized exclusively to maintain the salaries, wages, and benefits of aviation workers. Corporate restrictions during the relief period and for years after include, no dividends, no stock buybacks, and unprecedented limits on executive compensation. It conditions the carriers' receipt of federal funds on making no involuntary furloughs or layoffs. Participating carriers must also maintain levels of scheduled service, critical to maintaining air travel to smaller communities. In the pandemic this was especially important to ensure well-functioning health care and pharmaceutical supply chains to serve small and remote communities across the country.

¹ <https://cowen.bluematrix.com/links2/pdf/edd62e0f-e38a-4e77-9cea-c353ac5a6f87>

PSP has been an overwhelming success, responsible for saving hundreds of thousands of jobs across our industry, and maintaining critical spending in our communities, where every aviation job supports 3.55 additional jobs, or 1 in 14 jobs in the country.

Last October, when the program expired prematurely, the impact stretched across hundreds of thousands of families. The airlines' dire warnings turned into immediate and massive furloughs and layoffs. Adding to the impact of furloughs were aviation workers who took unpaid leaves to save their healthcare, or had to make gut-wrenching decisions like moving across the country in order to keep the job, adding individual cost and increased risk of exposure during the pandemic. Only the short-term extension in Congress' end of year emergency relief and the program support in the ARP prevented a total workforce disaster.

Even now, that two-month expiration continues to cause problems for airlines and the aviation workforce. As we warned prior to the furloughs last October, many furloughed workers, including those reinstated with the emergency relief signed into law on December 28, 2020, are still waiting for a spot in required requalification training. The emergency relief restored paychecks and benefits as of December 1, but workers still are not fully restored to their positions as training certification and security clearance requires significant time to recover. In aviation, a two to three month furlough is causing as much as seven months of disruption for workers and flight infrastructure. As late as June there will still be several thousand still in process for return after the furloughs at the end of 2020.

This is just one reason why Congress' decision to extend payroll support through September 30, 2021 in the ARP was so important. Airline operations - people, routes, and planes - cannot simply be turned on or off from one day to the next. Further, with PSP in place during the pandemic, airlines can maintain staffing necessary to ensure that no one goes to work when they aren't feeling well and to guard against delays and travel disruption if crewmembers need to call out sick. This flexibility is particularly important as we work to restore public confidence safe travel. Moreover, the protection against furloughs has provided job security for all those in our diverse field, notably for women and people of color, who were hit hardest by widespread furloughs.

At this moment, I think back twenty years ago to the months after September 11, 2001, a very different tragedy that shook commercial aviation to its core. In the aftermath, there was no PSP. The airline bankruptcies that followed September 11 ripped up our labor contracts and terminated our pensions. Thousands of airline workers lost their jobs and their health care, or shouldered a much higher percentage of the costs of care. As a Flight Attendant only five years into my career, I spent the next ten years watching the work of the brave women and men who came before me to create the contract that attracted me to United Airlines get picked apart and destroyed. Across the industry, dreams of golden years with a secure retirement earned over a lifetime of work were destroyed. The people I know and love at work are unbelievably resilient and inspiring. But the bankruptcies and mergers that followed delivered repeated blows that cut deep, and even ripped up contracts completely as management used mergers to divide workers and decertify their unions and the contractual and legal protections that came with representation. It was painful and still is. Families are still trying to recover. Consumers suffered too as seats got smaller, closer together, and the experience became all about the lowest costs of service. Controls were handed over to the bankruptcy courts, investment bankers, and predatory corporate lending that puts the public interests dead last. When we made the solemn vow after 9/11 to "Never Forget," we also vowed "Never Again" to honor the memory of our dear friends and heroes lost by fighting like hell for the living.

In the past year, we are proud to have played a part in shaping the very different approach we have taken together, a workers' first approach, ensuring that as airlines come back workers will not bear the long term economic harm from a crisis we didn't create. With flight volumes and revenues rising again, we feel optimistic that the PSP extension put in place through September is the bridge that workers and consumers need.

We hope that all members of the Committee take pride in the choice you made to center federal action on direct support for workers. As we think about the many challenges presented to this Congress, from addressing income inequality and racial justice, to rebuilding worker power and confronting the climate crisis, we believe the lessons of PSP are there as a guide.

Confidence in the safety of aviation

Aviation workers know that we can only restore air travel if we gain control over the virus. Our economic recovery, as much or more than any other industry, is tied to continued success in vaccination and widespread participation in effective public health measures.

Congress and the new administration must continue to promote a culture that puts safety first to renew confidence in travel and trust around the world in our nation's handling of the pandemic. When President Biden issued his Executive Order titled "Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel" on his first full day in office, it sent a clear message about the Administration's commitment to science, public health, and the essential workers on the frontlines. As we head towards the summer, we need all federal agencies to stay the course.

With domestic demand recovering, we particularly need leadership from Congress and the Administration to help safely restore international travel. A broad cross section of industry and labor groups have urged that the Administration adopt a data-driven, risk-based roadmap that carefully considers how and when to adjust restrictions. In 2020, overseas travel to the U.S. declined by 81%, costing hundreds of billions in losses to the economy. Simply put, we will never fully rebuild our aviation sector without the return of international travel. The global travel data firm OAG reported last week that just 60 percent of the direct international routes served in April 2019 (about 850 out of 1,400) are currently operating² and there are still travel restrictions operating across the world. We have a long way to go.

We support a comprehensive approach to safety that will protect passengers and crew while rebuilding public confidence in air travel, including continued vaccination with priority access for flight crews, mandating masks, minimizing food/beverage service, mitigating disruptive passengers, maximizing onboard ventilation and filtration, and establishing on-going sanitation protocols. We stand ready to support Congress and the Administration in the important and necessary work of implementing these measures. We appreciate the work from members of the Committee to clarify FAA's authority to take action to protect airline workers and passengers during a public health emergency.

Vaccinations are key

On April 15, Dr. Anthony Fauci testified before the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis that the country is now vaccinating 3 or 4 million people per day. Just two

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/travel/international-summer-travel-coronavirus.html>

days ago, April 19, was the date President Biden identified for all American adults to become eligible to book an appointment. Real progress.

However, challenges remain. In most states, frontline aviation workers, including Flight Attendants, were not prioritized for vaccine appointments and are only becoming eligible with the broader public. We continue to urge the CDC and states to include all transportation workers in groups with appointment priority. We also take the opportunity to remind our industry colleagues that some airlines are still prepared to assign disciplinary points to workers if their second vaccine appointment interferes with a previously scheduled work assignment. No one in America should have to choose between facing discipline at work and getting the vaccine. We should be encouraging everyone to do the right thing for public health.

Vaccination rates also remain too low in the historically-marginalized and poor communities that have borne the heaviest brunt of the pandemic. Government at every level needs to prioritize vaccine access for these communities and avail itself of trusted community partners to help get the job done. In some communities, leaders have shirked their responsibility and contributed to the spread of disinformation. This virus has never stopped at the border of Red counties or Blue counties, and we must work to raise vaccination rates in all parts of our country.

TRIPS Waiver will help vaccinate the world

We know that for American aviation to recover, we also need to combat the virus across the globe. On April 16, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that new cases per week have doubled over the past two months worldwide. Many countries seeing unprecedented surges have little access to vaccines at this time. Continuing to increase vaccine production and prioritize vaccine access and equity is absolutely necessary for the recovery of American aviation, international travel and the global economy. It is also a public health and national security imperative for the United States, and it will save lives.

For this reason, AFA-CWA has joined a growing coalition of U.S.-based consumer, health, and labor groups in supporting a COVID-19 emergency waiver of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) to make vaccines, treatments, and diagnostic testing available across the world. To quote Paul Farmer of Partners in Health, “if we want to stop COVID-19 here, we have to stop it everywhere.” We simply cannot allow patent issues to stop the world from protecting itself against COVID-19. Recovery of international travel depends on the whole world working together to defeat the virus and we are hopeful that the United States will soon lead on promoting urgent vaccine production and distribution around the world.

We need to extend the TSA Directive requiring mask wearing

As we work to restore air travel and reopen public life, we must continue to advance public health measures that will protect our health and our progress. As Dr. Fauci testified last week, “[n]ow is not the time to pull back on the effective public health measures such as masking, physical distancing” that we know can limit the spread of the virus. In aviation, we must continue to require masks and conduct enforcement in airports and on airplanes.

On April 15, 2021, our union wrote to Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Administrator David P. Pekoske to express our support and appreciation for TSA Security

Directive (SD) 15824- 21-01 (“Security Measures - Face Mask Requirements”)³ and to urge that the SD, which is set to expire on May 11, be extended at least through September 30, 2021.⁴ TSA issued the directive “to implement the January 21, 2021, Executive Order on promoting measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by travelers within the United States and those who enter the country from abroad⁵” and to support “enforcement of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Order mandating masks issued on January 29, 2021.”⁶ Since January 31, the SD has provided essential support to crewmembers and passengers and helped to restore public confidence in air travel. It must be extended now.

We know from experience that the flying public is ready to adapt to new behaviors when instructions are clear and rules are enforced. Passengers learned to stop smoking, pack minimal fluids in their carry ons, and turn off their cell phones for engine start and climb. They can readily adjust to wearing a mask if federal agencies clearly and repeatedly define both the expectation and the penalties for non-compliance. The vast majority of passengers already do this, but it only works if everyone properly wears a mask. We applaud FAA Administrator Steve Dickson’s recent public campaign to back up crew who enforce mask policies and other rules to keep everyone safe, including communicating the consequences for failing to do so. In March, Administrator Dickson extended his agency’s Special Emphasis Enforcement Program for disruptive passengers (including non-compliance with mask requirements) beyond its own original end date of March 30, 2021 because the “number of cases we’re seeing is still far too high, and it tells us urgent action continues to be required,”⁷ but unless TSA extends the SD, the future of the FAA enforcement program remains in doubt. The conflict we must manage over refusals to comply with mask requirements puts our safety and the safety of other passengers at risk. Flight attendants cannot be left to enforce public health policies without the backing of federal enforcement.

Minimize onboard food and beverage service to essential items

A 2020 study of COVID-19 infection by occupation in Norway found that flight attendants and their counterparts working on ships reported nearly five times the risk of COVID-19 during the second wave of infection last summer and fall, as compared to the general working population in Norway, when matched by age and gender.⁸ The only jobs that posed a higher risk of COVID-19 during that time involved serving food and beverages. Even health care workers were at lower risk. The data is clear: repeated exposure to unmasked individuals increases the risk of transmission. For this reason, to protect passengers and flight crews, it is critical that food and beverage services continue to be held to absolute minimums.

Study after study confirms that wearing a mask is the single best protection against spreading and receiving COVID-19. Modeling data and population studies both show a strong effect, but only when masks are worn properly and consistently. As Americans, we are told to wear a mask in the grocery store and the doctor’s office, and if we were to remove our mask to eat a

³ <https://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/sd-1542-21-01.pdf>

⁴ <https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/afacwa/pages/81/attachments/original/1618855676/20210415-AFALetter-TSA-ExtendMask.pdf?1618855676>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/21/executive-order-promoting-covid-19-safety-in-domestic-and-international-travel/>

⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/pdf/Mask-Order-CDC_GMTF_01-29-21-p.pdf

⁷ <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/faa-unruly-passengers-enforcement/index.html>

⁸ Magnusson, K; Nygard, K; Vold, L; and Telle, K. (2021) “Occupational risk of COVID-19 in the 1st vs 2nd wave of infection,” medRxiv preprint, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.10.29.20220426>; posted Nov. 3, 2020.

sandwich or sip a beverage in those environments, we'd be escorted off the premises. Flight attendants work in one of the most densely-occupied spaces in the world with windows that don't open, doors that aren't available most of the time, and limited ventilation.

Until the public health emergency is fully behind us, TSA and FAA must continue to send a consistent message about masking up to prevent onboard disease transmission, including mandatory, regular announcements for passengers to not remove their mask until the flight attendants have passed their row and, even then, to only "dip" their mask down momentarily to take a bite or sip ("dip and sip"). AFA recommends that airlines only serve cold food and drinks on flights less than 1,800 miles or three hours, that drinks are only distributed in individual cans/bottles, and that onboard alcohol sales are suspended until the pandemic is over.

Unruly and violent passengers

Starting in mid-2020 and worsening in 2021, crewmembers have experienced a notable increase in the frequency and intensity of disruptive passenger incidents, many of which involve the combination of alcohol and a refusal to comply with mask rules. As referenced above, AFA is deeply appreciative of the leadership from FAA Administrator Dickson who issued a new order on Jan. 13, 2021⁹ to enhance enforcement and penalties against disruptive passengers, and extended the same order on March 17.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the Administrator's decision to extend the enhanced enforcement program was borne of necessity. The Associated Press detailed a sobering FAA report that since late December, airlines have reported more than 500 cases of unruly passengers.¹¹ The FAA told AP that it was reviewing more than 450 of the cases and has "started enforcement action against about 20 people," in some cases pursuing civil penalties in excess of \$10,000 or \$20,000 for obscenities, shouting, refusal to follow instructions, and violence against flight personnel. In the charged environment in which we are attempting to regain control and restore confidence, we ask that the Committee join our efforts to maintain clear rules and robust federal enforcement.

Keep airline workers and passengers safe from exposure

Although vaccination rates are climbing among flight crews, frontline workers in our industry remain at significant risk of exposure. Crewmembers need consistent, safety-oriented definitions for what constitutes an exposure and need access to testing and pay-protected quarantines that put safety first. Particularly with PSP in place through September 30, carriers have the flexibility to ensure safe crews.

We also need better notification when crews and passengers are exposed to COVID-19. Wherever possible, airlines should be required to conduct a 72-hour lookback in response to a report of passenger or crew infection, with timely notification to flight attendants. The Public Health Agency of Canada maintains a website with a list of flights, including the date, airline, flight number, city pair (and seat number, if known), during which there was a report of one or more positive COVID-19 cases. The list provides a useful and inexpensive first step for contact tracing in a timely way. On this, we should follow the lead of our northern neighbor.

⁹ https://www.faa.gov/news/media/attachments/Order2150.3C_CHG%204.pdf

¹⁰ <https://apnews.com/article/travel-stephen-dickson-airlines-4022dce6b791b99b11bde22a86d877f4>

¹¹ <https://apnews.com/article/travel-stephen-dickson-airlines-4022dce6b791b99b11bde22a86d877f4>

Maximizing onboard ventilation and filtration

We urge the FAA to go beyond a recommendation and to mandate that all recirculated air on aircraft be filtered to the high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) standard. Airlines and manufacturers consistently claim that the high air exchange rate onboard aircraft protects passengers and crew from airborne exposure to viruses like COVID-19. While the air exchange rate onboard is high, so too is the production of “bioeffluents” onboard—the gases and particles, including viruses, exhaled by people. In the small space of the cabin, the rate of dilution of bioeffluents is consistently and considerably lower than in ground-based environments. Ensuring that aircraft ventilation systems are operating to maximize health and safety protects passengers and crew, minimize risk of transmission, and help build consumer confidence.

Implementing effective disinfection/sanitation protocols will help restore passenger confidence

As we seek to restore public confidence in air travel, we encourage our federal agency and industry partners to work together on cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitation standards that meet best practices for addressing COVID-19. All planes should have hot water and soap available for proper hand washing in every cabin restroom and, widely-available alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Building Back Better in commercial aviation

The pandemic’s unprecedented disruption has given all of us that chance to consider the future of aviation and how we build back safer and better than before. We offer a few thoughts here on reforms that we hope to work with Congress to support in the American Jobs Plan and other legislation.

Aviation can lead in protecting against the next crisis

In a crisis, we pull together to contain the threat and investigate the event fully to determine the changes necessary to ensure tragedy is not repeated. The human loss and economic disaster of this pandemic also serves as a clarion call to enact mitigation factors before the next world wide crisis bears down fully. Reactive measures stand little chance of containing the existential threat. As we build back from this pandemic, airline workers stand with Congress and the Administration as we work to rebuild our economy with a focus on sustainability and a commitment to addressing the climate crisis with urgent action. From the projected rise in severe turbulence to increases in weather-related disasters, Flight Attendants see and feel the growing consequences of climate inaction in our daily lives. We also know that leadership on climate must be rooted firmly in promoting good, union jobs and protections of income, retirement, and healthcare for workers in affected industries, and in the new jobs we create.

We believe that American aviation is positioned to rebound from COVID-19 with a new commitment to sustainability and climate action, grounded in emerging technology and science. We applaud the steps that our industry has taken in recent years to reduce emissions and develop solutions to achieve net zero emissions, including with cleaner fuels and more efficient air traffic controls. AFA will continue to advocate for our companies to set more ambitious climate goals and incorporate new strategies. We believe that investments in the

American Jobs Plan, including government support for sustainable aviation fuel and other programs, can help accelerate the progress our industry is making and position American aviation to model climate leadership for the world.

Aviation workers deserve access to job-protected sick time

All workers should be able to take a job-protected sick day, rather than come to work ill. In the absence of a uniform, national paid family or sick leave program, 13 states and the District of Columbia have stepped in to guarantee the access to sick time and/or paid leave. This number is sure to grow in the coming months and years, with new bills introduced across the country.

Unfortunately, the industry has opposed efforts to extend state sick leave protections to aviation personnel, going so far as to sue states that cover airline workers. We urge Congress to ensure that airline workers can access local paid family and sick leaves and also back employee-protected, national paid family and sick leave programs that would support our workforce all across the country. Even today, Flight Attendants are at risk of discipline simply for going to a vaccine appointment. It is time to guarantee job-protected sick time for all workers.

Protect children by requiring seats for all

If you visit the FAA's website today, you would learn that federal safety officials consider the use of child restraint seats (CRS) the safest way for infants and small children to fly. The website is explicit that "[y]our arms aren't capable of holding your child securely, especially during unexpected turbulence."¹² However, the use of CRS remains a recommendation, twenty years after the American Academy of Pediatrics first called on the FAA to require CRS. Infants and children under the age of two continue to fly on laps without their own seat. It is past time to mandate flight protection for our youngest passengers, and as we consider social distancing and mask concerns it is certainly time to implement this regulation for the safety of our smallest passengers and everyone on board with them.

Accountability and neutrality in airline contracting and high quality jobs

Members of this Committee have heard repeated concerns from labor and worker advocacy organizations about the mistreatment of workers by airline contractors. Despite your best efforts to protect the jobs of workers in cleaning, catering, and other contracted services during the pandemic, far too many employees of airline contractors were laid off or involuntarily furloughed in clear violation of the PSP rules. The Trump Administration and senior Treasury officials in the previous administration ignored repeated calls from labor and watchdog organizations to hold contractors accountable, even sanctioning their violations. The problem now is that all of us have come to expect too little. The essential workers at these companies deserve much more.

In the wake of smaller airline bankruptcies, access to lower cost aircraft, and pent up leisure travel demand, the entrance of new start-ups into the sector requires close monitoring. Competition in aviation can provide consumer choice and create jobs, but when cost-savings are achieved by cutting wages and benefits, our passengers and the entire workforce suffer. For this reason, AFA is closely watching new start-ups like Breeze Airways. Already we are

¹² https://www.faa.gov/travelers/fly_children/

seeing questionable hiring practices associated with a “work study program” that smells of age, gender, and race discrimination with no longterm career options, and major costs of employment shifted to the temporary workers. Our union is taking steps to protect these would-be Flight Attendants.¹³

As we turn to recovery in aviation, the widespread mistreatment of low wage employees of airline contractors is an issue that must be a priority to fix. We cannot continue to accept the fissuring, insecurity, and the hostility to organizing and worker rights in the lowest paid jobs in aviation, jobs disproportionately held by women, Black, Brown, and immigrant workers. We hope that you will work with us to ensure that all employers in aviation provide a living wage, safe and secure employment, and allow their workers to choose union representation without company interference. Dollars spent on union-busting are diverted from worker pay, benefits, and consumer experience. With the backing of the federal government, we can bring needed reforms to ensure aviation provides good jobs across the industry.

Closing

We thank the Committee for inviting our union here today to reflect on the recovery of aviation and the path ahead. COVID-19 has had a more severe impact on aviation than any other economic downturn or crisis in the 100 year history of our industry. There is no doubt that our country and the airline industry have the experience and resources to restore public confidence and return to the skies better than before. Aviation has a long history of collaboration among government, industry, unions, scientists, and consumers. This collaboration and careful approach to layered safety, security and health has built the safest mode of transportation, the backbone of the American economy, and the access that we enjoy around the world.

¹³<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/afacwa/pages/81/attachments/original/1618864736/AFA-UVU-FlightAttendant-WorkStudy-20210413.pdf?1618864736>