

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

**The Honorable Bill Shuster, Chair**  
***Oversight of U.S. Airline Customer Service***

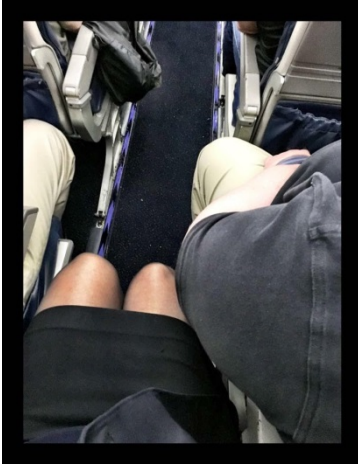
**Tuesday, May 2, 2017**



**Written Testimony of  
Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO**

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The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA) serves as the expert voice from the aircraft cabin with 50,000 flight attendant members at 20 airlines including mainline, niche, regional, international, and charter airlines. Flight attendants are Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certified to carry out cabin safety checks, crew coordination, passenger briefings, and all related safety, health and security regulations related to the aircraft cabin. Every effort is made to avoid emergencies, but when they happen flight attendants are charged with an immediate response to ensure the safety of all passengers onboard the aircraft. The role as aviation's first responders and last line of defense in aviation security is performed by cabin crew members who cannot effectively do their jobs without passengers recognizing the necessity of following crew member instructions.



*Crewmember jumpseat on a CRJ-900 Regional Aircraft.*

Every day, flight attendants working at U.S. airlines or based in the U.S. help tens millions of passengers on of thousands of flights and to safely travel to their destination without incident. This has become more challenging in recent years with task saturation at boarding and significant staffing cuts down to FAA minimums in domestic markets. The changes to the aircraft cabin with smaller seats closer together and record-high load factors through reduced capacity have led to greater human contact in the confined space. There is a rising tension on board our flights - in our experience exacerbated by a national narrative full of disrespect for authority, decency and decorum - and fewer of aviation's first responders to manage it. De-escalating conflict between passengers has become a significant portion of work flight attendants perform on each flight. Without recognition of their role and authority in the cabin we are very concerned about the dangerous conditions flight attendants may be facing at work.

The media frenzy around airline incidents in the past three weeks following release of passenger videos from United Express, American and Delta flights has created hostile conditions in the aircraft cabin across the industry. The horrific viral video from Republic flight 3411, operating as United Express, and the force used by the Chicago Aviation Security Officers led to a mob mentality internet attack on the people of United Airlines who had no role in the shocking event itself. Such an event of violence should never take place against any person on our planes – we all know this and we also know it can never happen again. The reality is that under the leadership of Oscar Munoz, United Airlines has transformed in a very short period of time. Employees are engaged, management is showing a respect for workers through good relations with unions, which has also resulted in improved contracts and the reverse of outsourcing begun by the former CEO.

The attack against United and the frontline employees was wrong. It has been pervasive at the airports, on the planes, on all stations and even in our schools, churches, and neighborhoods. It is demoralizing and has created incredible anxiety for flight attendants and other airline employees coming to work. It was especially challenging as the spread of incredible misinformation and misrepresentation of the facts could not be challenged without a vitriolic attack against the people of United Airlines. This reverberated for aviation workers throughout the industry. flight attendants had no role in this event and never would. We are aviation's first responders and last line of defense. We save lives.

It is important for the world to look at flight attendants and see the hero who revived someone's son, daughter, mother, father, sister or brother from a heart attack.

...to see the crew of three flight attendants delivering a baby in flight even through complications during the birth and without a single passenger being aware that at the same time these heroes were expertly handling a potential security threat.

...to see the flight attendant who was responsible for saving the lives of an entire airplane as

she revived both pilots from unconsciousness following a decompression.

...to see the flight attendant who, despite sustaining injuries during a crash landing returned repeatedly to the burning aircraft to pull people to safety.

...to see the flight attendant who worked with his crew to contain a bomb and stop a terrorist act.

There are thousands of examples of heroic acts performed by flight attendants and millions of examples where, every day, a flight attendant is seen as someone's hero. Aviation connects people as diverse as the communities we serve around the country and the world, every creed and conviction, background and belief. Flight attendants care for and safely usher passengers to the big business deal, the family vacation, the times of celebration, times of grief and times of battle. Respect for our work is critical.

Flight attendants need clear direction and support in doing our jobs. We are charged with keeping a safe cabin, yet we are being challenged daily when instructing passengers according to our training and required safety procedures. We are encouraging our members to "continue to lean on each other to maintain the best of who we are. We can't be second guessing ourselves when we need to protect the safety of the flight. We make every effort not to react to attempts to provoke us and stay focused on our mission as aviation's first responders."

The fallout from these viral video events is creating damage that we believe is far-reaching and threatens aviation safety and security. We have reports of passengers refusing to comply with crewmember safety instructions during boarding yet still are allowed to remain on board, jeering and harassing at crewmembers across the country. We have reports of airport security refusing to respond to passenger incidents of threats, assault or failing to comply with crewmember safety instruction. We have aviation "experts" encouraging the public on TV to continue to film the crew and broadcast it, which offers free video surveillance of crew movement and tested disruptive tactics for terrorists. This has to stop before the consequences are tragic.

We need regulators, lawmakers, and airline management to provide clear instruction to the public about the necessity of the role flight attendants play in aviation safety. Flight attendants are caught in the middle between the role we must play to help ensure the safest aviation system in the world and the "us against them" mentality created by these viral video events and the response to public judgment quickly rendered without all of the facts.

We recognize the need to study the conditions in air travel today and respond to the concerns of the millions of people who buy tickets on our airplanes. But we also need to make sure we are not creating a system where people are able to dismiss their responsibility as travelers who must comply with regulations and policies in place to keep them safe.

Airlines originally hired "stewardess" to make flights comfortable and stress-free for passengers. As the aviation industry grew, so did the roles and responsibilities of flight attendants. It wasn't until 1952 that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) required airlines to provide flight attendants for the safety and security of passengers. In September of 2001, the role of flight attendants profoundly changed as we added the last line of defense in aviation security to our responsibilities.

After nearly a decade of financial struggles, the increased use of regional carriers to supplement route structures and a series of high profile consolidation travel transformed from a glamorous luxury to a necessary mode of transportation. Flight attendant utilization increased significantly when airlines moved from a "staffing for service" standard to staffing at FAA minimums.

Flight attendants are dealing with an increasing range of demands due to this reduced staffing. The boarding process is especially stressful as the passengers look for bag storage while flight attendants perform both safety and service related duties. While dealing with customer service, flight attendants must remain ever vigilant for anything “out of the ordinary” which could be a threat to the safety and security of the flight.

In light of the recent events, airlines have begun to implement changes to policies and procedures to improve the passenger experience. We urge everyone to resist a “knee jerk” reaction and take time to thoroughly review any proposed changes to prevent unintended consequences. All stakeholders must be involved in this process. Let us note too that studies show front line employees are helping to turn out passenger satisfaction metrics including more on-time arrivals, fewer lost bags and less customer complaints. While we identify concerns, we also want to recognize the wonderful passengers on our planes who have taken the time to recognize our work and thank us for our efforts.

As a result of pressure from crewmembers and AFA, federal law affirms flight attendants’ authority in cabin of an aircraft and expressly prohibits passenger interference in these duties. 49 U.S. Code Sec. 46504 states, “An individual on an aircraft in the special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States who, by assaulting or intimidating a flight crewmember or flight attendant of the aircraft, interferes with the performance of the duties of the member or attendant or lessens the ability of the member or attendant to perform those duties, or attempts or conspires to do such an act, shall be fined under title 18, imprisoned for not more than 20 years, or both. However, if a dangerous weapon is used in assaulting or intimidating the member or attendant, the individual shall be imprisoned for any term of years or for life.”

Passengers are required to comply with crewmember instructions and we encourage them to wait for crewmember instructions before inserting themselves in incidents to prevent situations from escalating. We care deeply for our passengers and providing a safe journey for them. It is also critically important for our security in a post-9/11 world that we keep calm in the cabin and recognize our mutual interest in maintaining procedures that keep us all safe.

#### Recommended Policy and Regulatory Changes

In light of the current conditions in aviation, AFA believes several steps can be taken to assist with supporting flight attendants in performing safety duties and trust in aviation:

1. Public statements from regulatory bodies, Congress and industry leaders about the need to follow crewmember instructions to keep aviation safe and secure.
2. Increase flight attendant staffing and provide de-escalation tools and techniques.
3. A study of evacuation standards, including the reality of today’s aircraft cabin configuration.
4. Improved reporting of safety and security concerns to the proper authorities.
5. Banning the use of voice communications in the aircraft cabin.
6. Develop guidance for use of portable electronic devices on aircraft.
7. Announcements in the gate area reinforcing safety regulations, the role of the flight and cabin crew and reminders about videotaping for personal use only.
8. Involve the representatives of frontline aviation workers in any proposed policy or regulatory changes.

AFA is committed, in concert with our airline partners, to maintaining the safest mode of transportation in the world, through an efficient and friendly aviation experience.