

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2024

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chair
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
U.S. House
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
U.S. House
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Cantwell, Chair Graves, Ranking Member Cruz, and Ranking Member Larsen:

Thank you for your work to produce a bipartisan Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization bill that focuses on improving aviation safety and the passenger experience. We share your strong concerns over the strains on our aviation system and the need to strengthen it, which is why we write to express our profound opposition to any changes to the slot and perimeter rules at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA).

As you know, in July 2023, the House strongly defeated, on a bipartisan basis, an amendment on the House floor that would have added 14 additional flights at DCA, which is already at capacity. Unfortunately, the Senate Commerce-approved FAA bill included in the manager's amendment a provision that would add ten additional flights to DCA. As the House and Senate work toward a final FAA reauthorization bill, we urge you to reject any proposal to add additional flights at an overburdened DCA, which would negatively impact service and increase delays and cancellations for all passengers traveling to and from the airport.

That DCA is already overburdened is beyond dispute. The airport was designed to accommodate 15 million passengers, but this year, in part thanks to previous Congressional carve-outs to DCA's slot and perimeter rules, it is on pace to serve 25 million. These ten million excess passengers have strained DCA's resources, to the point that in 2022 it was reported that the airport has the third worst cancellation rate among our nation's busiest airports.¹ Today, 20-22 percent of flights into and out of the airport experience delays averaging 67 minutes.² And

¹ These US Airports Are the Worst for Cancellations and Delays This Summer, WTTW PBS News, 2022

² May 25, 2023 FAA Memorandum "Capital Access Alliance: DCA Air Service Analysis" at 2

landside congestion is, if anything, worse. As an illustrative example, consider that in 2022, during a single holiday weekend, more than 800 customers were turned away because DCA's parking garages were completely full.

While these delays already impact service to the airports listed below,³ the addition of ten new flights at DCA will make the situation worse for those traveling to and from the airport, including those with direct service and those who rely on connecting flights. The ten new flights, which would be allowed to fly beyond DCA's 1,250-mile perimeter, would mostly likely be flown by larger aircraft, with a correspondingly larger strain on DCA's resources. This strain will be felt on land, as aircraft used for beyond-the-perimeter flights bring on average 70 additional passengers per flight, and it will be felt in the air, as larger aircraft require farther separation standards, slowing down the cadence of take-offs and landings.⁴ Additional beyond-the-perimeter flying at an already at-capacity DCA would adversely impact service at these airports with increased delays and cancelations, downgrading the operational performance of these routes and hurting the passenger experience, with no benefit to these communities that rely on regular, reliable service to and from DCA.

It should go without saying that the safety of the flying public must be our primary focus, particularly as a number of high-profile incidents and near-misses have brought home in a concrete way the need to safeguard the complex and interconnected infrastructure that keeps the National Airspace System safe. Adding ten additional flights into an already overburdened airport is directly contrary to this goal.

For the forgoing reasons, we urge you not to include any additional slots to DCA in the final FAA Reauthorization bill.

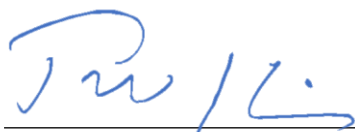
Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

³ Appendix A

⁴ GAO, "Information on Effects of Federal State Limiting Long Distance Flights," at 13-14 (November 2020)

Appendix A – Inside Perimeter Airports with Direct Service Flights from DCA

STATE	CITY	AIRPORT CODE	STATE	CITY	AIRPORT CODE
AL	Birmingham	BHM	MO	Kansas City	MCI
AL	Huntsville	HSV	MO	St. Louis	STL
AL	Montgomery	MGM	MS	Jackson	JAN
AR	Fayetteville	XNA	NE	Omaha	OMA
AR	Little Rock	LIT	NH	Manchester	MHT
CT	Hartford	BDL	NJ	Newark	EWR
FL	Daytona Beach*	DAB	NY	Albany	ALB
FL	Ft. Lauderdale	FLL	NY	Buffalo	BUF
FL	Ft. Myers	RSW	NY	New York City	JFK
FL	Ft. Walton Beach	VPS	NY	New York City	LGA
FL	Jacksonville	JAX	NY	Rochester	ROC
FL	Key West	EYW	NY	Syracuse	SYR
FL	Miami	MIA	NY	White Plains	HPN
FL	Melbourne*	MLB	NC	Asheville	AVL
FL	Orlando	MCO	NC	Charlotte	CLT
FL	Panama City	ECP	NC	Greensboro	GSO
FL	Pensacola	PNS	NC	New Bern*	EWN
FL	Sarasota	SRQ	NC	Raleigh	RDU
FL	Tallahassee	TLH	NC	Wilmington	ILM
FL	Tampa	TPA	OH	Akron/Canton	CAK
FL	West Palm Beach	PBI	OH	Cleveland	CLE
GA	Augusta	AGS	OH	Columbus	CMH
GA	Atlanta	ATL	OH	Dayton	DAY
GA	Savannah	SAV	OK	Oklahoma City	OKC
IA	Cedar Rapids	CID	OK	Tulsa	TUL
IA	Des Moines	DSM	PA	Philadelphia	PHL
IL	Chicago	MDW	PA	Pittsburgh	PIT
IL	Chicago	ORD	RI	Providence	PVD
IN	Indianapolis	IND	SC	Charleston	CHS
KS	Wichita	ICT	SC	Columbia	CAE
KY	Cincinnati	CVG	SC	Greenville	GSP
KY	Lexington	LEX	SC	Hilton Head*	HHH
KY	Louisville	SDF	SC	Myrtle Beach	MYR
LA	Baton Rouge	BTR	TN	Chattanooga	CHA
LA	New Orleans	MSY	TN	Knoxville	TYS
MA	Boston	BOS	TN	Memphis	MEM
MA	Hyannis	HYA	TN	Nashville	BNA
MA	Martha's Vineyard*	MVY	TX	Dallas Love Field	DAL
MA	Nantucket*	ACK	TX	Dallas/Ft. Worth	DFW
ME	Bangor	BGR	TX	Houston	IAH
ME	Portland	PWM	TX	Houston/Hobby	HOU
MI	Detroit	DTW	VA	Norfolk	ORF
MI	Grand Rapids	GRR	VT	Burlington	BTV
MI	Lansing	LAN	WI	Madison	MSN
MI	Traverse City*	TVC	WI	Milwaukee	MKE
MN	Minneapolis	MSP	WV	Charleston	CRW

* denotes seasonal service