

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 20, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Billy Nolen
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Secretary Buttigieg and Administrator Nolen:

We write to you today regarding the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Remote Tower Pilot Program and the remote tower at Leesburg Executive Airport (JYO). Congress has appropriated over \$30 million for the FAA's Remote Tower Pilot Program since 2018, and remote tower technology has been proven at Leesburg to improve safety and efficiency in a cost-effective manner in some of the most complex airspace in the nation. As long-time supporters of the remote tower program at JYO, we are deeply concerned that FAA's decision to end air traffic control services at Leesburg on June 14, 2023, will compromise safety, and urge the FAA to allow for the continuation of air traffic control (ATC) services at the airport while working with stakeholders on a long-term solution.

The current remote tower program safely provides ATC services every day to all operators flying in and out of Leesburg via remote tower, which has functioned without any operational errors or outages since its inception. Annual operations at the airport have grown by 47% since continuous ATC services began at Leesburg in 2018, and the airport has drawn a Customs Office for receiving international traffic, new businesses, a new fixed-base operator, flight schools, aircraft maintenance services, and increased corporate traffic in that time.

The ATC services provided by the remote tower are essential to the continued growth and safety of the airport, and we are very concerned by the potential consequences of eliminating those services. As you know, Leesburg traffic operates within the Washington, DC Special Flight Rules Area (SFRA). We believe that continued operation of the tower at Leesburg makes air traffic safer not only at Leesburg, but also at Dulles International Airport and at the other airports within this complex airspace.

Since operations began in 2018, the Leesburg remote tower has proven to be safe and effective. As documented in the FAA Operational Viability Decision (OVD) memo on the Leesburg Remote Tower (RT) system, which was issued by the FAA on September 29, 2021, we understand that the FAA conducted extensive air traffic operational evaluations of the system and convened "more than a dozen Safety Risk Management (SRM) assessments." The OVD also documented that "all safety performance targets have been met through all periods of operational use of the Saab, Inc., RT System for the provision of ATC services at JYO," and it led the FAA to determine that the Saab system installed at JYO was "operationally viable ... for the provision of ATC services." We further understand, based on FAA monthly reporting, that contract controllers have since provided safe and reliable remote ATC tower services for over 174,000 day, night, and all-weather operations since the OVD memo was issued. Additionally, Leesburg was accepted into the FAA's Federal Contract Tower program in October 2020.

In closing, we request that the FAA allow ATC services to continue at Leesburg until a suitable and safe solution to the current situation is identified. We reiterate our concerns about the safety impacts of terminating ATC services at the airport and urge the FAA to act to prevent such a scenario from

becoming reality. We also request that the FAA provide a briefing to our staff on this situation as soon as possible concerning the FAA's decisions regarding the certification process and potential paths forward for Leesburg and the remote tower program.

Concurrently, we request that the FAA assemble a small team of experts to independently evaluate the history of the Leesburg remote tower project, including all test, operational, and maintenance records. Our purpose is to determine if the Leesburg remote tower system already meets the intent of the FAA's recently established design approval requirements, and thereby would allow for the continued provision of ATC services at the airport. We are concerned that the certification process used for this innovative system is not standard for non-federal equipment, has changed several times over the years, and after five years changed again, and we strongly believe that an approval limited to Leesburg would recognize the system's demonstrated reliable and safe performance, enabling ATC tower services to continue to operate and maintaining safe operations at the airport.

We also welcome you to visit the airport to see firsthand how remote tower technology has successfully and safely provided ATC services for multiple years in the Washington, DC SFRA.

We appreciate your immediate attention to this important safety matter and look forward to hearing from you.

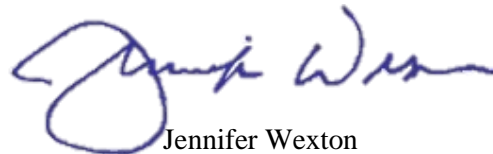
Sincerely,



Mark Warner
U.S. Senator



Tim Kaine
U.S. Senator



Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress