

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write to express our serious concern following the alarming near miss between two aircraft at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) on May 29, 2024. We understand the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continues to investigate this incident, which follows another near miss that occurred on April 18, 2024. These recent near misses underscore the critical importance of ensuring the highest safety standards at our nation's airports, particularly for an airport as busy and nationally significant as DCA.

As you are aware, DCA operates under unique landside size constraints and, with flights taking off and landing at the airport nearly every minute of every day, the airport's slot and perimeter rules are in place to manage the high volume of air traffic and ensure the safety and efficiency of operations. DCA, originally designed to accommodate 15 million passengers, now serves over 25 million annually. This situation that has led to significant stress on the airport's facilities and infrastructure.

Despite the public objections of the regional Congressional delegations, a provision in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 tacks on ten additional flights in and out of DCA that are exempt from perimeter rules. It is now up to the Department and FAA to implement these changes within 60 days of enactment of this legislation. However, recent near-miss incidents raise serious questions about the current capacity of DCA to handle additional flights without compromising safety of air traffic control operations.

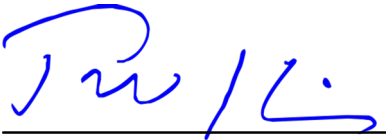
Ensuring that the National Airspace System is the safest and most reliable in the world must always be our top shared priority as senators and as Secretary. Therefore, we urge you to implement these changes at DCA with the utmost caution and concern for public safety, and without adding undue and unsustainable stress to its already overburdened infrastructure and personnel. At minimum, we owe this enhanced level of scrutiny to the passengers, airline staff, and airport workers who utilize this airport every day and rely on federal government regulations to keep them safe.

We ask that you please provide information on any actions that the Department is taking in light of these two near misses, including the rationale behind those actions and any potential future actions under consideration. We also request that the Department share its plans for minimizing added risk to DCA's facilities and personnel as these additional flights are forced in to the daily schedule. That information should include discussions with DCA, the Metropolitan Washington

Airport Authority, affected carriers, and communications with other stakeholders responsive to this request.

We look forward to your prompt response and to working together to ensure that DCA remains a safe and efficient hub for air travel.

Sincerely,



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator