



NO MORE DELAYS FOR FLIGHT ATTENDANT SECURITY TRAINING

Over two years have passed since the attacks of September 11. Shockingly, no meaningful guidelines have been established to address the woefully inadequate security training for flight attendants – the first responders in the sky, many of whom were the first victims in the attacks of September 11.

The original language on flight attendant security training included in the 2003 FAA Reauthorization bill, prior to last minute changes, was the product of compromises reached between Democratic and Republican staff in the Congress. Inexplicably, the GOP Leadership altered this delicately struck deal at the last minute in conference, apparently at the behest of Continental Airlines. This change eliminated the Congressional mandate that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) must develop a coordinated and comprehensive basic flight attendant security-training program. Transportation labor condemns this action and wonders what the flying public would say if they fully understood what their elected officials have done in the corridors of power.

Without a mandate, the airlines have free range to skirt their responsibility to provide flight attendant with the type of uniform security training they so desperately need. This leaves flight attendants, passengers and commercial airlines in the same situation they were before the September 11 attacks – woefully unprepared to defend the aircraft from terrorist attack. Without requiring the TSA to issue guidelines for mandatory flight attendant security training, most of the airlines will offer only the bare minimum and will make vital components like self-defense and crew coordination voluntary. This is hardly what Congress envisioned when it mandated flight attendant anti-terrorism training in the Homeland Security Act of 2002.

Flight attendants are the only workgroup in the cabin guaranteed to be on every commercial flight. Air marshals are on a very limited number of flights and the exact number is not known. TSA and the Department of Transportation (DOT) reports show that weapons are still making it through security screening in airports. Federal air marshals are still shooting flight attendants in simulated training exercises. This clearly demonstrates the need for a coordinated effort between air marshals, pilots and flight attendants to avoid real deaths should an actual hijacking occur. In addition, flight attendants report that air marshals are expressing concern about the lack of coordination between workgroups onboard commercial airlines.

Flight attendant self-defense and anti-terrorist training legislation has passed both chambers overwhelmingly three times since September 11, 2001. Each time the airlines' lobbyists have succeeded in watering down the clear intent behind this legislation. It is time for these games to stop.

Transportation labor will insist that the Homeland Security Department and its Transportation Security Administration issue meaningful and comprehensive flight attendant security training standards without further delay. Furthermore, we will once again take this issue to Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. We will tell these policy makers, our members and the public to demand that TSA immediately allocate resources and personnel to the development of mandatory basic flight attendant security training requirements.

Security is too important to be left to chance, yet that is exactly what our government has done in relation to flight attendant training. It is past time to address this problem and we stand ready to do what is necessary to close the flight attendant security training loophole.

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