



A bold voice for transportation workers

IMPLEMENT COMMON SENSE RULES TO COMBAT FATIGUE FOR FLIGHT CREWS

For workers in the aviation industry, like those in almost every sector of our transportation system, the issue of fatigue is of paramount concern. Few factors have as direct and negative effect on aviation safety, security, and efficiency as a tired workforce.

We know that regulatory requirements dealing with rest and duty periods for pilots and flight attendants are too often inadequate, leaving these aviation professionals deprived of critically needed rest. In the face of past and ongoing financial turmoil, air carriers attempt to reduce costs by pushing flight crews to work right up to the limits set by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and have taken advantage of "reduced rest" provisions that further exacerbate fatigue issues.

The nation witnessed the terrible consequences of this approach on February 12, 2009, when a Colgan Air regional flight carrying 49 souls crashed in Clarence, NY. The NTSB later determined that fatigue likely impaired the pilots' response to the adverse conditions leading up to the crash. Immediately following this tragic accident and to address pilot fatigue issues that have plagued the industry, the FAA issued a "Call to Action" and began to work through the regulatory issues that needed to be addressed.

As a result of this work, the Department of Transportation and the FAA, on December 21, 2011, issued new rules on airline pilot flight- and duty-time limitations and minimum rest requirements. These science-based rules mark a major step forward in making air travel safer by, among other things, establishing minimum rest hours between flights and per week, and requiring operators to implement Fatigue Risk Management Programs, which address the chronic fatigue that plagues our nation's pilots. These critical steps are the culmination of a multi-year effort led by the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), a TTD affiliate, to bring common sense safety reforms to the daily working lives of pilots.

We are disappointed however, that cargo carriers are completely exempt from the new regulations. Despite claims to the contrary, pilots that fly for cargo carriers suffer from the same fatigue issues as commercial passenger pilots. Cargo carriers have long used their lobbying might in Washington to win exemptions and carve-outs for a host of safety and security rules and they have once again succeeded at putting their financial interests ahead of the public interest. We are pleased that Secretary LaHood has committed to bringing the various parties within the aviation industry together to extend and implement uniform pilot safety standards. Not surprisingly, cargo industry representatives have already pushed back from this dialogue and continue to insist that they should not be bound by the same common-sense rules set to govern the rest of the industry. We reject this argument and call on the Administration to extend its regulations to cargo operations. Failing Administration action, we will support legislation that will apply these rules to all cargo pilots in the same manner they are applied to passenger pilots.



Adequate fatigue regulations and protections also continue to elude our nation's flight attendants. The FAA Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) recently released a report which concluded that changes to flight attendant work rules are necessary and that reform is needed to combat fatigue. Aside from the issue of fair working conditions, flight attendant fatigue is a passenger safety concern. In this post-9/11 world, flight attendants share a larger role in safety and in-flight security. Fatigue can impede flight attendants' ability to monitor the flight cabin and fulfill their duties as first responders in cases of emergency or evacuation.

In the House of Representatives, we support the Airline First Responder Workplace Fairness Act (H.R. 3824), introduced by Rep. Mazie Hirono (D-HI), which would establish a pathway to implement reforms that will combat flight attendant fatigue. The legislation instructs the FAA to create an Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) comprised of balanced representation from the aviation community, including flight attendant unions and other safety experts. The ARC would have one year to study flight attendant fatigue, review the CAMI findings, and issue recommendations to the FAA Administrator. The FAA would then have one year to issue a proposed rulemaking followed by six months to issue a final rule. It is past time for flight attendant fatigue rules to be updated to reflect the changing demands of the job and to ensure safe and humane working conditions. This legislation provides the framework necessary for implementing science-based fatigue rules that will make our skies safer.

Flight crew fatigue is a paramount safety concern. No worker, regardless of their vocation and skill level, can do their job to the best of their abilities without adequate rest and recovery time. It is past time for the federal government and the airline industry to listen to scientific evidence on fatigue, and to stop requiring aviation professionals to perform their responsibilities without adequate regulations governing duty-time and minimum rest requirements. We will continue to support legislation and regulations that will implement fair, comprehensive fatigue rules that will improve working conditions and make our skies safer.

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