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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

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CHARLES E. KIEFFER, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

January 27, 2016

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson:

We are writing to express our opposition to legislation that would separate the air traffic control function of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) from the rest of the agency and remove that function from the congressional appropriations process.

It has been suggested that the part of the FAA that currently manages air traffic – the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) – could become an independent government agency, a nonprofit organization, or even a for-profit firm. These proposals have two fundamental problems: they break apart the FAA, and they diminish the ability of Congress to oversee the aviation system. The United States is a world leader in aviation, with the largest, most complex air transportation system in the world. We are also a world leader in aviation safety. Commercial aviation fatalities are at historic lows, yet the FAA continues to innovate and improve its approach to safety oversight. It does not make sense to break apart the FAA, an essential part of our success in aviation.

Furthermore, the public would not be well served by exempting any part of the FAA from annual congressional oversight. The annual appropriations process provides the oversight of agency resources that is necessary to ensure accountability for program performance and a sustained focus on aviation safety. Congressional oversight also ensures that the FAA maintains a system that works across the aviation industry, including general aviation and small and rural communities as well as commercial airlines and large metropolitan cities.

The current authorization for the FAA's programs activities expires at the end of March. We appreciate the importance of your work to ensure that the next authorization supports aviation safety and addresses important issues such as the modernization of our air traffic control system, the timely certification of aviation products, and the integration of unmanned aerial systems into our national airspace. We believe, however, that these efforts

would be undermined if the reauthorization legislation breaks up the FAA or puts any part of agency funding on autopilot.

Sincerely,



Thad Cochran, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Barbara Mikulski, Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Susan M. Collins, Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Jack Reed, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development
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