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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

We write to express our concerns regarding the consumer and competitive limitations of the perimeter rule at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) and solicit clarification of related statements made by the FAA.

DCA is the only airport in the country with a perimeter rule imposed by Congress that is still enforced. The perimeter rule restricts nonstop flights from DCA to a distance of 1,250 miles, unless an exemption is granted, which can limit consumer choice and reduce competition. Only 10 cities have an exemption to the perimeter rule, and two carriers control over 50 percent of beyond perimeter slots at DCA. In three previous Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorizations – 2000, 2003, and 2012 – Congress added a total of 20 roundtrip beyond perimeter slot exemptions and 10 roundtrip within perimeter slot exemptions¹. Congress is considering additional slot exemptions – within or beyond the perimeter as determined by the air carrier – in the current FAA reauthorization to bring more choice, competition, and lower fares to the travelling public.

Consumers are harmed when private economic actors are disincentivized to compete in the marketplace. In the airline industry, reduced competition can lead to inadequate travel options and higher average ticket prices. For example, current air fares from DCA to Seattle are almost 20 percent higher than surrounding Washington, DC airports because one carrier controls the nonstop DCA to Seattle market.² The Department of Transportation (DOT) concluded several years ago that the three major Washington airports – DCA, Dulles International Airport (IAD), and Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI) — are not economic substitutes and that, correspondingly, the presence of less costly service alternatives are not sufficient to mitigate the harm to consumers that can occur from significantly reduced competition at DCA.³

---

² Cirium Aviation Analytics, U.S. DOT O&D Summary Report for flights from SEA to DCA, IAD for travel YE Q4 2022 (unpublished data report) (retained by Delta Air Lines from Cirium’s Diio Mi product).
³ Nick Pasion, *Sadly, Dulles is the Most Expensive Airport for Domestic Travel*, WASHINGTONIAN (June 2, 2023), [https://www.washingtonian.com/2023/06/02/dulles-ranks-most-expensive-airport-for-domestic-travel/](https://www.washingtonian.com/2023/06/02/dulles-ranks-most-expensive-airport-for-domestic-travel/)

---
A 2020 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) analyzing the impact of previous slot exemptions at DCA also found that delays caused by the addition of beyond perimeter flights in 2012 were not substantial. The GAO also analyzed U.S. government flight delay data for 2019 and found that the percentage of on-time departures and arrivals at DCA is slightly above average across all large-hub airports.

Recent statements by the FAA are inconsistent with these findings from the Department of Transportation and the GAO. A May 25, 2023 FAA Air Traffic Organization (ATO) memorandum released to Congress contained unsupported claims about potential delays resulting from the addition of perimeter slots. We believe the memorandum did not provide sufficient detail and context for its claims related to delays. It also did not mention that DCA currently has three non-peak times that could accommodate more flights without adding any additional delay. Furthermore, the memo focuses on delay scenarios and does not discuss other important topics, including economic factors, impact on competition, and consumer choice.

Accordingly, we request a written response by August 10 to the following questions:

1. Have the slot exemptions authorized by Congress since 2000 provided greater access to DCA? If not, please explain.

2. Have slot exemptions authorized by Congress since 2000 fostered greater competition between airlines servicing DCA? If not, please explain. Which locations have more than one carrier because of Congressionally-authorized slot exemptions?

3. Did previously authorized slot exemptions cause significant delays at DCA? If so, please explain.

4. Would adding flight slots to current non-peak hours lead to addition delays? If so, please explain.

5. If Congress authorized additional within and beyond perimeter exemptions, will travelers have more access to affordable fares? If not, please explain.

Thank you for your attention to our letter and response.

Sincerely,

Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

Mike Lee
United States Senator

---

4 Reagan National Airport: Information on Effects of Federal Statute Limiting Long-Distance Flights, GAO.