

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 7, 2024

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell:

As you work to finalize this year's reauthorization bill for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), we urge you to operationalize the important work done by the FAA's Mental Health and Aviation Medical Clearances Rulemaking Committee (ARC) by requiring that the FAA implement the ARC's recommendations.

Currently, pilots and air traffic controllers who seek mental health care are unfairly penalized by a system that perpetuates a culture of silence. While aviation professionals are mandated to report if they seek mental health care, once they take that step, they are faced with delays, confusion, and overbroad regulation in the process of returning to work. This often means that relatively minor mental health concerns result in long wait times and derailed careers for safe and well-trained pilots and air traffic controllers, which exacerbate the culture of silence that is rooted in a fear for their livelihoods.

In December 2023, the FAA recognized the need to reform its current policies and established the ARC to identify barriers to mental health care for aviators and present recommendations to the FAA to address these challenges. Earlier this April, the ARC published its report, which found six main barriers to care: culture, trust, fear, stigma, financial, process, and a knowledge and information gap. To address these barriers, the ARC coalesced around a list of 24 recommendations to eliminate some of the main barriers to care.¹

The ARC's recommendations include lowering barriers to care for common and low-risk conditions for pilots and air traffic controllers. They suggested that pilots and air traffic controllers need not disclose their talk therapy to the FAA. This change would encourage these professionals to seek treatment and reduce threats to their careers by acknowledging low-risk conditions.² Additionally, the ARC suggested reducing the mandatory stabilization period for pilots taking antidepressants, and minimizing the requirement for neurocognitive testing, aligning them more closely with standards used by our peer nations.³

In addition to reducing the burden of reporting routine mental health care moving forward, the ARC recommended that the FAA create a non-punitive pathway for aviators and air traffic controllers to disclose previously unreported mental health diagnoses and treatment. This is an important step in acknowledging and righting the culture of silence created by the FAA's current system, which incentivizes non-disclosure. Implementing these recommendations will ensure that the U.S. aviation system remains the safest in the world.

The ARC's recommendations have received significant support from prominent organizations in the aviation industry, including the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA)⁴ and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

¹ Mental Health & Aviation Medical Clearances Aviation Rulemaking Committee. (2024, April 1). Mental Health & Aviation Medical Clearances Aviation Rulemaking Committee Recommendation Report.

https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/Mental_Health_ARC_Final_Report_RELEASED.pdf

² See *id.* at 35.

³ See *id.* at 41 and 39

⁴ Air Line Pilots Association. (2024, April 2). *ALPA Commends FAA Mental Health Rulemaking Committee Recommendations*. News Room. <https://www.alpa.org/news-and-events/news-room/2024-04-02-alpa-commends-faa-mental-health-rulemaking-committee>

(AOPA),⁵ both of which participated in the ARC, as well as the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA),⁶ National Business Aviation Association (NBAA)⁷, and the Pilot Mental Health Campaign (PMHC). They are the result of months of collaboration between experts and stakeholders in the aviation community.

As you work to finalize the 2024 FAA Reauthorization bill, we strongly encourage you to include language requiring the FAA to expeditiously implement the critical recommendations of the ARC.

Sincerely,



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Lori Chavez-DeRemer
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

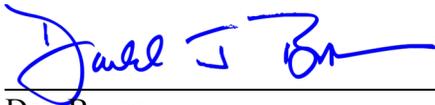


Colin Z. Allred
Member of Congress

⁵ Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. (2024, April 3). *FAA publishes Mental Health Recommendations*. News & Media. <https://www.aopa.org/news-and-media/all-news/2024/april/03/faa-publishes-mental-health-recommendations>

⁶ National Air Traffic Controllers Association. (2024, April 1). *NATCA commends the FAA's mental health and Aviation Medical Clearances Aviation Rulemaking Committee and encourages the Agency to adopt its recommendations*. NATCA. <https://www.natca.org/2024/04/01/natca-commends-the-faas-mental-health-and-aviation-medical-clearances-aviation-rulemaking-committee-and-encourages-the-agency-to-adopt-its-recommendations/>

⁷NBAA - National Business Aviation Association (2024, April 4). *NBAA Welcomes ARC Recommendations Addressing Aviation Mental Health*. <https://nbaa.org/2024-press-releases/nbaa-welcomes-arc-recommendations-addressing-aviation-mental-health/>



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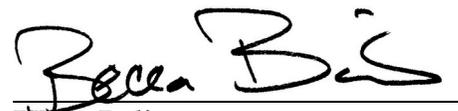
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