

**118TH  
CONGRESS**



**AN INTRO TO THE  
ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT  
ATTENDANTS-CWA, AFL-CIO**

On behalf of the more than 50,000 Flight Attendants represented by the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO, we congratulate you on your election to the 118th U.S. Congress! We look forward to developing a productive relationship with your office over the next couple of years and, hopefully, years to come.

Chances are you've already met AFA Flight Attendants onboard a recent flight. We were there to greet you as you boarded your flight. We ensured your bags fit properly in the cabin and reviewed the safety features of our aircraft with you. While in the air, we offered refreshments and food; perhaps we assisted you with your entertainment options and connecting flights. We may have even been seated next to you and heard about your travels. We were there to wish you well on your way.

We hope that the traveling public never has to experience the reason Flight Attendants are required to be on flights--ensuring the safety of you and all the passengers in our care. We spend months in initial training preparing for flight safety and potential threats. We must be re-qualified annually to ensure the safety of the traveling public.

We are trained to deal with aircraft emergencies including firefighting and emergency evacuation procedures, medical emergencies, security threats, and much more.

Our union, as part of the Communication Workers of America, AFL-CIO, represents Flight Attendants from 19 airlines domestically and abroad. AFA Flight Attendants work for major, regional, niche, and charter carriers.

We are proud to represent the interests of an exceptionally diverse workforce who share common goals of advancing our profession, ensuring our economic security, safety on the job, and sharing our love of seeing the world with passengers.

Flight Attendants, along with other aviation and railroad workers, fall under the Railway Labor Act (RLA) instead of the more commonly known National Labor Relations Act (NLRA of 1935).

Many labor and employment laws have left out airline workers. For example, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1960 generally exempted airline workers. We have fought to gain protections as workers while recognizing our unique workspace. Our women-led workforce fought and won a long legislative battle for the rights and protections under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 to apply to our profession, with the passage of the Airline Flight Crew Technical Corrections Act of 2009.

We are eager to get to know you and share some of our legislative priorities for the 118th Congress. We look forward to working with you!



# STOPPING FLAG OF CONVENIENCE AIR CARRIERS

Congress has long ensured that airlines based in the United States remain owned and controlled by American entities. Historically, air transport agreements are negotiated by the Department of State and the Department of Transportation, and we believe this process must remain in place with Congressional oversight. Any attempt to redefine ownership and control blatantly bypasses congressional jurisdiction and disregards over 60 years of aviation policy and precedent.

A “Flag of Convenience” business model permits airlines to establish operations in countries with lower labor standards. This business practice precipitated the loss of tens of thousands of U.S. maritime jobs and undermined safety. We cannot let this happen to the U.S. airline industry.

Having outsourced, non-U.S. citizens doing security-sensitive and life-saving safety jobs raises serious concerns because we would lose oversight in hiring, standards, and adequate security background checks. This could jeopardize lives and our economy, and compromise national security by allowing foreign ownership of critical domestic infrastructure. Congress and federal agencies must address the potentially severe repercussions of the ‘flag of convenience’ practice in aviation. The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA supports legislation that would prohibit ‘flag of convenience’ practices from expanding to the aviation sector industry.

# UPDATE AIRCRAFT EMERGENCY EVACUATION STANDARDS

As part of implementing Sections 337 and 577 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, the FAA conducted a study in late 2019 through early 2020 to determine the effects of different seat dimensions and spacing on facilitating emergency evacuations. However, the agency used **simulated laboratory conditions, and not a real airplane**, to conduct its evaluation. Further, the study sample did not include any children, adults over 60, or people with disabilities as participants. Since children, older adults, and people with disabilities are the least likely to be able to evacuate an airplane in a safe and timely manner, the FAA's study did not demonstrate or accurately depict if all passengers can safely evacuate an airplane in under 90 seconds (the standard amount of time for an emergency evacuation). The FAA itself conceded that, because they did not include these groups in their study, the study results were "not necessarily definitive."

In addition, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General (DOT IG) conducted an audit in September 2020 after the FAA conducted its congressionally-mandated airplane evacuation study and found that that the "FAA conducts insufficient research on passenger behaviors – such as evacuations with carry-on baggage and use of emotional support animals – and seat dimensions to determine how they affect evacuation standards."



*This lack of passenger behavior research and data limits FAA's ability to assess risk to ensure passenger safety to the extent possible in emergency evacuations. FAA also does not collect comprehensive data from evacuations and does not maintain certification data to identify emerging risks and needs for regulation updates. For example, the FAA does not collect data on factors that influence actual evacuation times."*

Congress must require that the FAA conduct a legitimate aircraft evacuation study to update its standards using an actual plane (and different aircraft bodies), including all types of participants, factor in the current aircraft seat dimensions, carry-on baggage, emotional support animals, the use of electronic devices, passenger behaviors, and more to reach an accurate conclusion about its evacuation standards.

# SEATBELTS FOR ALL TICKETED PASSENGERS



The FAA currently permits children under two years old to sit unbelted on their parent's lap. The FAA, NTSB, and independent researchers have all concluded that this is dangerous, citing studies showing that lap infants are at higher risk of injuries caused by everything from falling from their parent's laps to turbulence to trauma incurred in a crash. It is effectively impossible for a parent to hold onto their unbelted child during a crash. In 1994, for example, one unrestrained infant died and another was severely injured after their plane had to make an emergency landing off of its runway. After investigating the crash, the NTSB determined that, had the babies been secured in their own FAA-approved child restraint seats next to their parents, they would not have suffered significant injury. In recent decades, both the NTSB and the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security have recommended that the FAA prohibit infants under age two from sitting on their parent's laps.

In 2001, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended requiring aircraft-approved restraint systems and discontinuing the policy of allowing a child younger than 2 years to be held on the lap of an adult during taxi, takeoff, landing and turbulence.

More recently, responding to strong support from its Member States around the world, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) released the Second Edition of its Manual on the Approval and Use of Child Restraint Systems (CRS). This manual details guidance to promote the use of child restraints at the global level, simplify international operations, and make it easier for passengers traveling with CRS.

There remains no credible rationale for the U.S. to fail to require that all passengers, including infants and children under the age of two, have their own seats and are properly restrained during critical phases of flight. This requirement should apply to all U.S. carriers and foreign carriers flying to the U.S. The FAA can use the ICAO guidance to address all related issues, including the harmonization of approved child restraint systems.

**It's past time to mandate this protection for our youngest passengers.** We can and should do better to protect our children. One injury or death of a child is one too many. In order to keep children under two years old safe during flights, the FAA must eliminate the exception for lap children and require all passengers to have their own seats on the plane.



# ENDING DISRUPTIVE PASSENGER ABUSE AND VIOLENT INCIDENTS ON AIRPLANES



Incidents of disruptive passenger behavior on flights spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic. The FAA received a record 5,981 reports of unruly passengers in 2021. Throughout this period of increased bad behavior, Flight Attendants have borne the brunt of the violence.

According to a 2021 survey of Flight Attendants, over 85% had dealt with unruly passengers in the first half of last year. The most egregious incidents escalated to major flight disruptions, and in some cases physical violence.

For example, on an Alaska Airlines flight in March 2021, a Colorado man who refused to wear a face mask swatted at a Flight Attendant, then stood up and urinated in his seat area. In May 2021, a Southwest Airlines passenger punched out a Flight Attendant's teeth out after being told to keep her seat belt fastened.

Since the mask mandate was lifted onboard the aircraft, we, unfortunately, continue to deal with unruly and abusive passengers.

**The Association of Flight Attendants recommends the following to deter this behavior that is on the rise:**

## **1** CREATE A BANNED PASSENGER LIST

Traditionally, each airline has kept its own internal list of passengers whose behavior was so egregious that they are no longer welcome to fly with that carrier. But that leaves the door open for a passenger who was banned on, say, United Airlines, to simply book future travels on Delta, American, JetBlue or Southwest.

Legislation is necessary so that passengers whose unruly or violent actions which result in a civil or criminal penalty could then be referred by the FAA or DOJ and placed on a banned passenger list maintained by the TSA.



## 2

### BAN OPEN TO-GO ALCOHOL AND REQUIRE ALCOHOL SIGNAGE

Alcohol is a major contributor to incidents of violence on planes. While the FAA has taken additional steps to tamp down on disruptive passenger abuse and violent incidents with their “zero-tolerance policy”, more needs to be done to deter pugnacious passengers.

Most passengers are unaware that passengers can be denied boarding if they appear intoxicated. The federal government should urge airports and vendors to stop the sale of open container TO GO alcoholic beverages in the terminals, and require airport signage reminding passengers that you may not consume your own alcohol onboard and of the federal regulation ( 14 CFR §121.575) that one will be denied boarding if they appear intoxicated.

A public campaign educating travelers about this regulation will deter many passengers from drinking excessively before their flights and becoming a danger to Flight Attendants and other passengers.



## 3

### ESTABLISH A HEALTH AND WELLNESS FUND

Reports of disruptive passenger incidents last year were more than 20 times the amount in a typical year. And these are just the incidents reported. Flight Attendants are enduring the mental and physical toll of the increased incidents.

The FAA has levied approximately \$2 million in fines to disruptive passengers since January 1, 2022. These fines collected by the FAA should be utilized to create and sustain a health and wellness fund that flight crews can access to offset the cost of their medical bills, additional time off if needed, counseling, time spent testifying in court against their assailant, etc.





## IMPROVE CABIN AIR QUALITY

On all aircraft except the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, Flight Crews and Passengers alike breathe what is referred to as “bleed air”, which is outside air being bled off the engine compressors. This high temperature and pressured “bleed air” is then cooled, mixed with recirculated air, and distributed through the cabin and flight deck for ventilation. There is a serious flaw with this design when oil intended to lubricate the engine accidentally contaminates the bleed air system. This can be a result of a mechanical issue, oil seals not closing properly during engine power change, or over-servicing by maintenance crews.

Because “bleed air” is not filtered before entering the cabin ventilation system, if this air becomes contaminated by engine or hydraulic oil, the fumes cause what is known as a toxic “fume event”. These toxic fume events can also be caused by complex mixtures of chemicals including exhaust fumes, fan failures, and de-icing fluids.

Fume events from a toxic mixture of chemicals create the potential for long-term health effects, including neurological and respiratory damage not only for crews but also for passengers. Furthermore, fume events often occur repeatedly on the same aircraft after their faulty “bleed air” systems have been deemed airworthy despite the airline not having fixed the underlying problems.

The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA urges Congress to require the FAA to issue regulations to compel the documentation of fume events; investigation of bleed air fume events, and to mandate that airlines provide training to Flight Crews, maintenance technicians, and emergency response teams on how to respond to and identify the causes of fume events.





# CABIN TEMPERATURE STANDARDS AND COLLECTING DATA

There are no federal standards defining acceptable temperature ranges for airplane cabins for both boarding and inflight. Passengers and Flight Attendants often experience discomfort, fatigue, and stress due to extremely hot or cold temperatures. Sometimes these extreme temperatures can cause passengers and crew to experience life-threatening symptoms, including heat stroke, loss of consciousness, and respiratory arrest.

The FAA and Congress should adopt the temperature standards recommended by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). These standards state that the temperature onboard aircraft should be between 65–80 degrees on the ground for boarding, disembarking and during flight.

**To ensure airlines adopt and implement the cabin temperature standards Congress and the FAA should:**

- Create a Basic Safe Temperature Range.
- Mandate that commercial aircraft have temperature gauges onboard.
- Require airlines to notify passengers if the cabin is too hot or cold.
- Penalize airlines that repeatedly board, disembark and fly aircraft with extreme temperatures
- Publicize FAA reports on extreme temperatures onboard aircraft and airlines.



# RADIATION EXPOSURE AT HIGH ALTITUDES

According to the National Council on Radiation and Measurements, Flight Attendants are the most radiation-exposed workers in the U.S. because of the significant amount of time working at high altitudes. Flight Crews are consistently exposed to cosmic ionizing radiation.

Harvard's School of Public Health 2018 study showed Flight Attendants have a higher-than-average rate of developing every type of cancer that the researchers investigated. According to the study, Flight Attendants develop female non-melanoma skin cancer at 4x the rate of the general public and male and female melanoma skin cancers at twice the rate, due to exposure to cosmic ionizing radiation.

The FAA has formally recognized that airline Flight Crews are occupationally exposed to ionizing radiation and recommended that crews be informed about radiation exposure and health risks.

Further, the FAA urged that airlines assist crews in making informed decisions about radiation exposure. The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA agrees that more must be done to protect and educate Flight Attendants about these on-the-job health risks.

The following recommendations would be a good start to addressing the issue of radiation and Flight Crews:

- Require airlines to educate Flight Attendants on the risks of radiation exposure and how to track their own radiation exposure before bidding on their trips.
- Require the FAA to conduct a study on the risks of cosmic ionizing radiation to Flight Attendants' health and potential solutions.

# CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES/TESTING

37 States, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico have legalized Medical Marijuana. Many Flight Attendants would benefit from the use of medically-prescribed marijuana for the treatment of severe medical conditions including cancer, AIDS, epilepsy, and glaucoma.

Flight Attendants are at a vastly higher risk than the general public for experiencing many of these conditions and, more generally, have higher rates of stress, mental health problems, physical injuries and illness than most workers due to the intense and challenging nature of our profession.

Removing marijuana from the DOT drug testing panel (except for incident-related drug tests) as well as requiring the DOT to use saliva-based testing rather than hair-based testing would allow those with prescribed medical marijuana to treat their ailments legally. In addition, the requirement for the DOT to consider any marijuana test results from an employee with a medical marijuana prescription to be automatically negative would be a necessary component of this law.

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## WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU

Flight Attendants continue to endure many challenges in our industry. It is our hope, through a positive working relationship with your office, that we will make the skies safer and advances the Flight Attendant profession, so that we will no longer need to negotiate for rights and protections already afforded by law to other workers. It is also our hope that you will enjoy working with the leaders of our Government Affairs Department and see that we pride ourselves on our professionalism, integrity and good faith in the efforts to represent aviation's first responders.

Should you have any questions please feel free to send an email to Stephen Schembs, AFA Director of Government Affairs at [sschembs@afacwa.org](mailto:sschembs@afacwa.org). More information can be found on our website at [afacwa.org](http://afacwa.org).



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