



Testimony of

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Before the

Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation,
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Related Agencies

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Good morning, Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Jennifer Homendy, and I am honored to serve as Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide an update regarding the NTSB's activities.

I want to begin by thanking you for your incredible support of the NTSB and its workforce and our ability to carry out our vital safety mission by increasing our FY25 funding level to \$145 million in the Continuing Resolution (CR).

As you know, the NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating and establishing the facts, circumstances, and cause or probable cause of all civil aviation accidents and serious incidents in the United States and defined accidents in all other modes of transportation, including roadway accidents, grade crossing incidents, railroad accidents, pipeline accidents, major marine casualties occurring on or under the navigable waters, internal waters, or the territorial sea of the United States, and other accidents related to the transportation of individuals or property when the Board decides the accident is catastrophic, the accident involves problems of a recurring character, or the investigation of the accident would carry out our statutory requirements.¹ In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to aid victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

Our current investigative workload includes almost 1,250 active investigations in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, in addition to supporting more than 160 foreign investigations in over 50 countries. Throughout a typical year, we work on about 2,200 domestic and 450 foreign cases, and we expect the number of cases annually to remain high and continue to increase in complexity.

Our most recent major investigations include the February 3, 2023, Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio; the November 14, 2023, fatal collision

¹ In addition, current law also requires us to, among other things, maintain a 24-hour response operations center; deliver a family assistance program, which includes facilitating the recovery and identification of fatally injured passengers involved in accidents we investigate and communicating with the families of passengers involved in accidents throughout our investigations; formulate safety recommendations based on our accidents; develop and issue written reports of each accident we investigate within two years of the date of the accident; ensure public availability and disclosure of information related to our investigations; maintain certain electronic systems, including the public docket system and the multimodal accident database management system; maintain a Chief Data Officer, a Chief Financial Officer, a Chief Information Officer, a Performance Improvement Officer, and an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Director; govern all proceedings on appeals taken from decisions of the Federal Aviation Administration Administrator and U.S. Coast Guard Commandant sustaining orders of an administrative law judge, revoking, suspending, or denying a license, certificate, document, or register in defined proceedings; conduct strategic and workforce planning; establish budgets; conduct certain enforcement proceedings (specific to family assistance); implement the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Freedom of Information Act, and EEO legal requirements; and much more.

of a commercial motor vehicle with a passenger vehicle and bus carrying high school students and their chaperones near Etna, Ohio; the November 16, 2023, Chicago Transit Authority collision with a snow removal machine; the January 5, 2024, in-flight structural failure of a Boeing 737-9 MAX over Portland, Oregon while on its way to Ontario, California; the March 26, 2024, contact of the container ship *Dali* with the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and subsequent bridge collapse, in Baltimore, Maryland; and the January 29, 2025, midair collision between a PSA Airlines Bombardier CRJ700 Airplane (operated as American Airlines flight 5342) and a Sikorsky H-60 US Army helicopter (operating under the callsign PAT25) in Washington, DC.

Flight 5342 was a scheduled domestic passenger flight operating under the provisions of 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 121 from Wichita Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport (ICT), Wichita, Kansas, to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). The Army helicopter originated from Davison Army Airfield, at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and was conducting an annual check ride flight with night-vision goggles for the co-pilot.

Flight 5342 departed ICT at 5:39pm central standard time. At 8:43pm eastern standard time (EST), flight 5342 contacted DCA tower and checked in for visual approach to runway 1. The local controller (LC) asked if flight 5342 could accept runway 33. Flight 5342's crew accepted runway 33 for landing, at which time PAT25 was traveling southbound, operating under visual flight rules, along the Potomac River. At about 8:47pm EST, the LC instructed PAT25 to pass behind flight 5342 and issued a traffic advisory. PAT25 reported "traffic in sight" and that it would maintain visual separation. The collision occurred about 8:48pm while flight 5342 was on final approach to land on runway 33.

That collision over the Potomac River in Washington, DC, resulted in the loss of 67 lives – the 2 pilots, 2 flight attendants, and 60 passengers aboard the airplane and all 3 crew members aboard the helicopter.

We have already issued a preliminary report and urgent recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). I again want to commend the Secretary of Transportation – Secretary Duffy – and the Federal Aviation Administration for its swift acceptance of these recommendations. There is still much work to be done in this investigation, and we will keep this Committee updated on our progress.

Two nights later, on January 31, 2025, a Learjet 55 operating as a medevac flight crashed into a commercial and residential area shortly after takeoff from Northeast Philadelphia Airport in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The two pilots, two medical crewmembers, and two passengers were fatally injured. One person on the ground was fatally injured, 4 people were seriously injured, and 20 people incurred minor injuries.

Less than a week later, on February 6, 2025, a Bering Air Cessna 208B Grand Caravan disappeared from radar while en route from Unalakleet to Nome, Alaska, and

was found crashed on a large floating icepack. The pilot and nine passengers were fatally injured.

Earlier this month, on March 10, 2025, Air Care 3, a Eurocopter Deutschland GMBH EC135 P2+, crashed into a heavily wooded swamp near the Ross R. Barnett Reservoir in Madison, Mississippi. The helicopter was destroyed by a postimpact fire. The pilot and 2 crewmembers were fatally injured.

Combined, over 70 NTSB investigative, family assistance, and other support staff have launched to the scenes of these tragic accidents, and more are working in our laboratories and at headquarters to support the NTSB response.

Additionally, the NTSB serves as the United States' Accredited Representative under international treaty, *Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation*, which means we lead the United States' response to the investigation of hundreds of accidents that occur overseas annually. These include our most recent support to the Korean Aviation and Railway Accident Investigation Board (ARAIB) in its investigation of Jeju Air flight 2216, which resulted in 179 fatalities, as well as the October 29, 2018, crash of Lion Air Flight 510 which crashed in the Java Sea, resulting in 189 fatalities, and the March 10, 2019, crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 near Addis Ababa Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, resulting in 157 fatalities. On January 27, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire delegated the investigation of the January 24, 2025, accident involving United Airlines flight 613 enroute from Lagos, Nigeria, to Washington Dulles International Airport to the NTSB.

Some investigations, understandably, get more public attention than others, but all of our investigations are critical for improving transportation safety. We know that we owe it to the families of those involved, to the communities where events occurred, and to the traveling public to find out what happened, how and why it happened, and to make recommendations to help ensure it never happens again. Some of our other significant ongoing investigations include the following:

- A multivehicle crash on the Ohio Turnpike in Swanton, Ohio.
- A multivehicle crash between a motorcoach and tractor-trailers parked along a rest area ramp in Highland, Illinois.
- A tanker truck rollover and rupture with anhydrous ammonia release in Teutopolis, Illinois.
- A hot air balloon accident in Eloy, Arizona.
- A collision between two New York City Transit trains near the 96th Street station in Manhattan.
- Three marine accidents that occurred on the Cooper River in Charleston, South Carolina.
- A grade-crossing collision in Pecos, Texas.
- A collision involving a vehicle operating with partial driving automation in San Antonio, Texas.

- A collision between two vehicles resulting in a postcrash fire in Carrizo Springs, Texas.
- A rail employee fatality in Decatur, Alabama, and other employee fatalities in Arkansas, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Wisconsin.
- A natural gas-fueled building explosion in Youngstown, Ohio.
- A fire aboard a dredging vessel in Jacksonville, Florida, resulting in a crewmember fatality.
- A fire aboard a container ship at Port of Newark, New Jersey.
- A midair collision between two airplanes in Marana, Arizona.

In addition, over the last 2 years, we have completed many significant and complex investigations and issued safety recommendations in all modes to prevent tragedies similar to those I mentioned. These completed investigations responded to tragedies that occurred in some of your states or that involved your constituents, such as the following:

- A mid-air collision during the Commemorative Air Force's Wings Over Dallas air show in Dallas, Texas.
- A truck collision with a group of bicyclists in Goodyear, Arizona.
- A highway crash in Tishomingo, Oklahoma resulting in fatal injuries to six teenagers.
- A fire on a battery electric transit bus in Hamden, Connecticut.
- An anchor strike resulting in a leak from an underground pipeline near Huntington Beach, California.
- A pipeline rupture and crude oil release in Edwardsville, Illinois.
- A grade-crossing collision between a Metra commuter train and a box truck in Clarendon Hills, Illinois.
- Rail and transit employee fatalities in Texas, Ohio, New Jersey, Alabama, and Illinois.
- An Amtrak train (*Empire Builder*) derailment in Joplin, Montana.
- A natural gas-fuel explosion and fire in Coolidge, Arizona.
- A multivehicle collision in Phoenix, Arizona.

We currently have over a thousand open safety recommendations across all modes as a result of our investigations. In 2024, we issued 132 new safety recommendations and closed 86. Of those closed, excluding those that were classified reconsidered, no longer applicable, and superseded, 58 (77 percent) were closed acceptably, meaning that the recommendation recipient took action to implement the safety recommendation. This includes actions to enhance aviation safety by requiring operators to implement safety management systems, increase focus on highway bridge maintenance, help prevent damage to underwater pipelines, and help prevent train derailments due to unexpected weather conditions. This success rate demonstrates the value of our recommendations and our work with stakeholders, including parties to our investigations, to improve safety. Our recommendations are meaningful, and we

appreciate recipients' efforts to address them.

The NTSB is a small agency that plays a vital role in ensuring public safety and protection of life and property in all that we do. I appreciate the need to right-size the federal workforce; in fact, I strongly agree with that goal. However, the NTSB runs lean; we always have. We have just 430 employees to carry out our mission and are authorized by Congress to go up to 450, though we would need significantly more than that to truly be fully staffed. To quote Chairman Womack, we punch far above our weight. Everyone at the NTSB plays a role in achieving our mission to make transportation safer. Their hard work, professionalism, and dedication is the reason that the NTSB is regarded as the world's preeminent safety agency. To complete our investigations and develop recommendations that advance safety changes without delays, we must meet the challenges that come with increasing growth and innovation in transportation. Therefore, it is critical for the agency to have additional resources to respond to events without affecting our timeliness, the quality of our work, or our independence.

I want to thank the committee for your support to increase the NTSB's funding over the last 3 years. As a result of that support, we have been able to make much needed progress in hiring for the agency. The vast majority of that growth has been in our investigative offices (Aviation Safety, Highway Safety, Marine Safety, and Railroad, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials Investigations). Still, despite those efforts, we continue to need additional investigative staff, as well as staff in the operational offices where increases have not occurred to the same extent. This includes staff in General Counsel to work through a backlog of petitions for reconsideration of investigations and airman, mechanic or mariner's certificate appeals, as well as party-related issues and external legal disputes; staff in the Office of the Managing Director to enhance the agency's overall use of data to improve the NTSB's effectiveness and innovation; staff in the Office of the Chief Information Officer to address mandated cybersecurity enhancements and the backlog of Freedom of Information Act requests; and staff in Human Capital and Training to support recruitment, hiring, and other actions critical to developing and retaining a highly-productive workforce.

The fact is, our greatest asset is our workforce, which accounts for over 70 percent of our costs. We rely on a staff of highly skilled individuals with technical expertise in such areas as mechanical engineering, chemistry, and human performance to conduct accident investigations and identify life-saving safety improvements. We must continue to attract and retain talent with expertise in emerging technologies and the transportation systems of tomorrow. And without our workforce, we will not be able to carry out our congressionally mandated mission to protect public safety. Our workforce is highly technical, and approximately 25 percent of the employees are retirement eligible within 1 year; this number increases to approximately 40 percent over the next 5 years. We need to build a deeper bench *now* to prepare for upcoming attrition.

For the NTSB to carry out its mission-critical work, we must have a fully trained workforce ready to respond to more than 1300 new accidents per year, 24 hours a day,

7 days a week, and deliver comprehensive, timely, and concise investigation outcomes and safety recommendations to protect life and property and prevent future transportation-related accidents and injuries from occurring.

The funding you are providing for FY25 is necessary to adequately support the staffing, training, and technology we need to maintain the world's gold standard in transportation safety investigations. In addition to various governmentwide mandates, the 2024 NTSB reauthorization also included several mandates that we will have to pay for over the next 2 years, including extensive digitization of paper and microfiche records, implementation of a drug-testing program for employees, and assessments of accessibility barriers at our agency offices. To maintain US leadership, NTSB must keep pace with industry, emerging technologies, the Department of Transportation, the Coast Guard, and other countries. Simply put, we need more people, more training, and more technology. Funding that only keeps pace with inflation will be a detriment to our efforts to right-size the NTSB and maintain the world's gold standard in service to the travelling public.

In addition to meeting the mandates outlined above, with the \$145 million Congress has appropriated NTSB for FY25, we will be able to increase our agency size to 450 onboards, bringing us closer to truly full staffing. We will invest in developing further expertise in emerging technologies, and we will also modernize our own internal IT environment to enable efficient transportation investigations and better protect against increasingly sophisticated malicious cyber-attacks.

As you consider the NTSB's appropriations for FY26, I respectfully request that Congress support our ability to carry out our critical safety mission now and in the future; to recruit, retain, and develop a highly qualified and specialized workforce; and to prepare the agency for investigations involving emerging transportation technologies and systems to improve transportation safety.