

Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Member Day Hearing | April 18, 2023

TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE BRIAN K. FITZPATRICK

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this Member Day hearing and providing me with the opportunity to share the concerns of my constituents and communities.

As you begin the difficult task of authoring the FAA Reauthorization Act this year, I strongly urge the Committee to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of the American people both in the skies and on the ground.

Last July, as a member of this Committee, I raised the issue of secondary cockpit barriers to Secretary Buttigieg and shared the story of my constituent, Captain Victor J. Saracini. As many of you know, Captain Saracini's aircraft – United Flight 175 – was hijacked on September 11, 2001, and flown into the World Trade Center.

After any tragedy, my first question is always what could we have done differently to prevent this from happening? While there are many answers in this case, secondary cockpit barriers are certainly one of our best.

Despite being included among the recommendations issued nearly two decades ago by the 9/11 Commission and as a requirement for new aircraft in the last FAA Reauthorization bill over 4 years ago, few commercial planes have a secondary barrier and the flightdeck remains vulnerable. We must keep our commitment to say "Never Again," preventing terrorists from infiltrating the cockpit and using a commercial airliner like a guided missile.

I urge the Committee to exercise oversight of the Department of Transportation in this case and as I am, call on Secretary Buttigieg to issue the final rule that was due in 2019.

Further, as you begin to consider this year's FAA Reauthorization, I urge you to include H.R. 911, the Saracini Enhanced Aviation Safety Act. This bipartisan bill, which I introduced in February alongside Representatives Carson, Gottheimer, Kean, Lynch, and Smith would extend the implementation of this low-cost security measure to all commercial aircraft in the United States.

The security of the flightdeck is essential to the safety of our pilots, flight crews, passengers, and their families.

As Co-Chair of the bipartisan Disabilities Caucus, I would also like to encourage the Committee to continue to improve airport and aircraft accessibility.

While some progress has been made, when I speak with my constituents that have rare diseases and disabilities, much more work needs to be done to ensure that the boarding, in-flight, and deplaning experiences of those with disabilities are improved across the board.

Passengers deserve transparency – that is why I joined Ranking Member Cohen and Senators Duckworth and Fischer to introduce the Prioritizing Accessibility and Accountability for Aviation Consumers Act. This bill will ensure accountability from the airlines and the Department of Transportation with regard to their effectiveness in directly resolving disability-related complaints. I strongly urge the Committee consider the inclusion of this bipartisan, bicameral initiative in the FAA Reauthorization Act.

Lastly, the noise pollution caused by aircraft and airports, when not addressed, is an unacceptable encroachment on our communities' health, well-being, and safety. For my constituents, the Trenton-Mercer Airport, although located in New Jersey, is situated such that planes take-off and approach over lower Bucks County, unnecessarily disturbing residents and disrupting daily life. While small in size, this airport has sought to expand by adding 2 fully operational gates.

Despite the fact that this will increase the number of annual flights by the thousands, the Trenton-Mercer Airport has failed to account for the impact these new gates will have or to implement any noise reduction and abatement strategies.

Congress can and must address the health and safety issues caused by aviation-related noise pollution, especially for vulnerable and underserved communities. Last week, I was proud to join Representative Lynch in proposing a step in the right direction: the Air Traffic Noise and Pollution Expert Consensus Act. Our bipartisan bill, which I urge this Committee to consider for inclusion in the FAA Reauthorization Act, would require a report on the health impacts of air traffic noise and pollution.

When making critical decisions about airports like Trenton-Mercer, the FAA should have to consider the opinion of our nation's experts. Our communities should not be left behind by Washington bureaucrats.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify today.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee and all my colleagues on common-ground, common-sense solutions to transportation and infrastructure issues in this 118th Congress.