

**Statement of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters
Before the
United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation**

*“Addressing Close Calls to Improve Aviation
Safety”*

November 9, 2023



International Brotherhood of Teamsters
25 Louisiana Avenue
Washington, DC 20015

On behalf of our 1.3 million members the International Brotherhood of Teamsters submits the following statement regarding the Subcommittee's hearing entitled "Addressing Close Calls to Improve Aviation Safety". The Teamsters are proud to represent safety critical employees across the aviation industry including pilots, technicians, flight attendants, ground crew, dispatchers, radio operators and others. Collectively, highly skilled and qualified Teamster members in the aviation industry work tirelessly to ensure the safety of our National Airspace System and that goods, passengers, and fellow workers reach their destinations safely.

Given the scope of our membership, the Teamsters are uniquely qualified to provide a broad analysis of the safety conditions and challenges we observe in the aviation industry. We hope to continue to work with members of both the Subcommittee and full Committee to provide our members perspectives on these issues, both in the context of the FAA Reauthorization bill, and on safety trends as they appear, including the recent spate of near miss incidents.

While recent near miss incidents are likely the result of a culmination of factors that the Subcommittee will examine today, we state clearly that Congress must not step backwards on statutory requirements that keep our skies safe. Specifically, the Teamsters unequivocally oppose any changes to the 1,500 hour rule, which requires that most pilots have completed 1,500 hours of flight time before they receive their Airline Transport Pilot certificate. This requirement ensures that commercial pilots can draw on substantial real-life experience to operate safely and nimbly respond to changing conditions and dangerous circumstances to avoid near misses and actual accidents. Since its inception, the standard has demonstrably contributed to the United States' gold standard of aviation safety. Changes to the rule within FAA Reauthorization negotiations run directly counter to the mission of today's hearing and must be rejected outright.

Critical to any conversation on aviation safety is the ability of aviation workers to report safety events, including those involving regulatory violations, without fear of certificate action or disciplinary actions from their employers. To this end, the Teamsters have long been supportive of the Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP), in use across Teamster-represented carriers and aviation crafts. By reporting these incidents, the FAA can better identify safety trends or recurrent problems and take remedial action with that information – information which the FAA may never be made aware of outside of an ASAP report. It is essential that Congress and the FAA allow the program to work to its full potential, and that the FAA closely monitor reports from employees, particularly those which illuminate conditions that could ultimately contribute to a near miss incident, or an actual accident.

Across the industry, we remain concerned about the prevalence of so-called "green-on-green" situations and their potential role in near miss incidents – circumstances in which individuals with lower operational experience are paired, for example, a new first officer flying with a newly upgraded captain, a relatively inexperienced technician supervising the work of a technician who has only recently earned their Airframe and Powerplant license, or even across work groups, such

as new pilot communicating with a new air traffic controller. While the FAA places some restrictions on pilot pairing predicated on time in type, unique circumstances stemming from industry disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent reopening have resulted in increased incidents of green-on-green situations. Both airlines and the FAA must be cognizant of the risks and consider how to best avoid such circumstances.

Broadly, we also caution against safety regimes predicated on an overreliance or over expectation of technology. While Teamsters members have long been deeply involved in the testing and deployment of aviation technologies, many of which have contributed to remarkable safety improvements, there is no replacement for the human skills developed over the course of high-quality, rigorous training and one's subsequent career.

Finally, we would like to draw Subcommittee members' attention to an ongoing issue with a direct if not often overlooked nexus to avoiding near miss incidents. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters represents approximately 120 aviation radio operators and maintenance technicians employed by FAA-contracted Aeronautical Radio, Inc. (ARINC) working in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, Texas and other states. These radio operators provide critical safety communications to civilian and military pilots in the cockpit when operating flights over the world's oceans using high frequency (HF) radio communications technologies. Additionally, ARINC technicians maintain the Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System (ACARS), a digital datalink system used to transmit messages between civilian and military aircraft and ground centers via airband radio or satellites.

Unfortunately, ARINC has refused to bargain in good faith for over two years, as the company offers paltry wage increases alongside harmful cuts to health care benefits. ARINC's prolonged failure to make a reasonable offer to our members threatens the company's ability to retain and recruit the essential network of safety personnel it requires. An inability by the company to provide its services, or as discussed above, to do so with a heavily inexperienced staff as senior operators leave for better wages elsewhere, creates real and self-inflicted safety risks for aircraft and pilots, including risks of near miss incidents. It is our sincere hope that ARINC will come to the table with a fair offer before such an incident occurs.

As members of the Subcommittee continue to consider the issues of near misses, and aviation safety broadly within the context of the FAA reauthorization bill, we strongly urge you to rely on the on the ground and in the air experience of Teamsters frontline aviation workers. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters looks forward to continuing to work with Subcommittee members on these key issues going forward.