



PROFESSIONAL AVIATION SAFETY SPECIALISTS

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**PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVID SPERO
PRESIDENT
PROFESSIONAL AVIATION SAFETY SPECIALISTS, AFL-CIO
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND
TRANSPORTATION
ON
STRENGTHENING THE AVIATION WORKFORCE
MARCH 16, 2023**

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on behalf of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO.

PASS represents approximately 11,000 FAA and DoD employees throughout the United States who are tasked with ensuring that the U.S. aviation system remains the gold standard of safety. The diversity of the PASS-represented workforce provides insight into the safety of the system they maintain and the industry they oversee.

The largest PASS bargaining unit is the ATO Technical Operations unit, consisting of technical employees who install, maintain, repair and certify the radar, navigation, communication and power systems making up the air traffic control system. PASS has long called attention to not only the need for sufficient technical staffing but also the lack of a reliable staffing model on which to base staffing decisions and placement.

The work of FAA technicians is vital to the safe and efficient operation of the NAS. While keeping the system safe is the number one priority of PASS members nationwide, the work they perform “in-house” can also save the agency time and money.

Sufficiently staffing this workforce can lead to the upgrade of the NAS in a much more efficient and cost-effective manner. To that end, PASS is asking that the FAA be directed to establish a Technical Operations Workforce Plan and consult with PASS in its creation and implementation. PASS believes that the abilities and skills that Tech Ops employees provide, if utilized and staffed properly, can provide a distinct improvement in the implementation of new NAS systems.

PASS also represents aviation safety inspectors and other employees within AVS. Aviation safety inspectors in the Flight Standards Service and Aircraft Certification Service

(Manufacturing District Offices – MIDO) are responsible for certification, oversight, surveillance and enforcement of the entire aviation system.

PASS is extremely concerned about the agency’s inability to effectively and consistently staff the FAA inspector workforce. Fifty-nine percent of the Certificate Management Office and 79% of the Flight Standards District Office managers said in a 2021 Inspector General report that they are understaffed. Among the reasons for this serious level of understaffing are increasing workload, hiring challenges, extended hiring and training periods, and increasing oversight responsibility (including new entrants and the evolving UAS segment). Furthermore, the “staffing model” currently being used by the agency is insufficient to determine the number of aviation safety inspectors needed.

PASS is asking that the FAA be directed to revise its inspector staffing model in consultation with PASS. PASS is also requesting that the FAA increase the number of safety-critical positions in Flight Standards.

PASS is currently in contract negotiations on new collective bargaining agreements with the FAA for the employees we represent in both ATO and AVS. PASS views these negotiations as opportunities to focus on recruitment and retention of these essential employees.

In fact, contract negotiations should serve as the perfect vehicle to promote recruitment and retention efforts. However, I regret to report that little progress has been made, especially when it comes to AVS negotiations. PASS sincerely seeks to assist the agency in maintaining and enhancing its aviation safety workforce if only the agency was as equally committed.

Finally, one of the elements that would help our collective bargaining is having a permanent head at the FAA. In a quote attributed to Teddy Roosevelt, he said, “The best

executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”

Not every FAA administrator was a pilot, and to my knowledge, no FAA administrator was a safety inspector, a technician, a controller, or an airport operator, but I believe Phil Washington has the necessary attributes to succeed as the next FAA administrator.

PASS appreciates the opportunity to share information and recommendations regarding the FAA workforce. We stand ready to assist members of Congress as you work toward addressing this important issue.