

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

April 18, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy:

I write to you during a pivotal moment for air safety regarding an issue near and dear to me: the 1500-hour pilot training requirement established in the aftermath of the tragic Colgan Flight 3407 in February 2009, which claimed the lives of 50 people.

This essential safety standard—born from profound loss and championed with unwavering dedication by the families of the victims—has been instrumental in advancing the safety of our nation’s skies over the past decade. Now, with air safety concerns more prevalent than ever, this rule is vital to keep air travel safe, uphold the integrity of our aviation system, and save lives. I strongly urge you to meet with the families of Flight 3407, as every Transportation Secretary has done since the tragedy. I am confident that you, like your predecessors, will find their wisdom, experience, and insight to be invaluable.

As you know from our January 2025 meeting in my office, I have worked arm-in-arm with the 3407 families for more than 16 years. With serious and growing concerns about air travel safety across the country, there is no room for hesitation: the 1500-hour rule must not only be upheld, it must be defended without compromise. You gave me your word that you would protect it. Now, I urge you to meet with the families of Flight 3407—the ones who paid the highest price—and make that same commitment to them, clearly and unequivocally.

The Colgan crash alerted our nation to shortfalls in our aviation safety system, particularly at the regional airline level, where the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) accident report found 46 contributing factors, many directly related to piloting experience. Immediately, I joined the families in the fight to close the massive gaps in air safety and save lives: ultimately leading to the passage of the *Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administration Extension Act of 2010*.

The totality of the 2010 law’s provisions has made the skies safer by putting the best pilots in the cockpit and setting them up for success. A keystone of that law was a mandatory First Officer Qualifications (FOQ) rule, colloquially known as the 1500-hour rule, that was formally adopted in 2013. This rule requires 1500 hours of in-air training and experience, among other requirements, prior to prospective pilots earning their Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate. Against industry objections and repeated attempts to circumvent this safety standard, the 1500-hour rule has proven to be a life-saving success and has been upheld in every FAA reauthorization since its adoption, including the most recent 2024 reauthorization.

I will be frank: I am gravely concerned about Bryan Bedford’s nomination to serve as FAA Administrator. Mr. Bedford has been one of the most vocal and persistent advocates of rolling

back and circumventing basic air safety standards, including the 1500-hour rule. I find Bedford's nomination to run the very agency tasked with keeping our skies safe incredibly dangerous.

As early as 2014, less than a year after the 1500-hour rulemaking process took effect, Mr. Bedford – serving as Republic Airways CEO – sought to reduce the number of hours required to serve as a pilot-in-command of a commercial airline.<sup>1</sup> Again in 2022, the Bedford-led Republic Airways sought to circumvent flight-safety regulations by requesting an exemption from the 1500-hour rule.<sup>2</sup> The FAA eventually denied this request, following strong advocacy from me and the families against Bedford's attempt to roll back safety standards. Given his history, there is ample reason to believe that Bedford would utilize the authority delegated to the Administrator in Sec. 217(d) of the 2010 law to grant credits that would effectively erode the 1,500-hour rule.

Congress's intent in delegating this authority was to empower a safety-minded FAA Administrator with flexibility to give credits for accredited academic training experience certified by either the military or the FAA, not with an end-around to effective safety standards. Mr. Bedford's anti-safety track record suggests that he will abuse his authority to enhance the financial performance of regional airlines at the cost of safety for the American flying public.

Make no mistake, the 3407 families and I will doggedly fight against any attempt by Bedford to weaken air-safety, just as we have successfully done so for years.

There is a phrase in Hebrew: "May their memory be a blessing." Since the 2010 FAA law's passage, the memory of the 50 lives lost on Flight 3407 has become just that—a blessing that has protected millions of American travelers. Through unimaginable loss, the families turned grief into action and pain into purpose. Today, with serious questions surrounding air safety in America, I ask you to honor your commitment to me to protect the 1500-hour rule, to meet with the Flight 3407 families to reaffirm the same, and to let the memory of those we lost continue to serve as a blessing—for their families, for our skies, and for all Americans.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Bedford, *Hearing on Air Service to Small and Rural Communities*, testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Aviation, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., April 30, 2014, <https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2014-04-30-bedford.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Duncan, Ian. *FAA Rejects Republic Airways Proposal to Cut Qualifying Flight Time*, The Washington Post, 19 Sept. 2022, [www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/09/19/faa-pilot-hours-republic-airways](http://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/09/19/faa-pilot-hours-republic-airways)