

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 25, 2024



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Michael G. Whitaker
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Whitaker,

We write to urge the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to provide additional information on its efforts to better utilize Designated Pilot Examiners (DPEs) pursuant to the requirements set forth in Section 833 of the *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024*. More effective utilization of all available DPEs is essential to promptly address the national pilot shortage that plagues local and regional airports. While the FAA currently authorizes 935 DPEs to administer tests, 75% of tests are administered by only 350 examiners, with 50% of tests administered by roughly only 200 DPEs.¹ This gross lack of active examiners is exacerbating an already significant pilot and examiner shortage that threatens the stability of our national air service network, particularly for regional airlines and the communities they serve.

Based on data from the Regional Airline Association (RAA), 45% of all Part 121 commercially-rated pilots will retire over the next 15 years, with 15% (approximately 16,000 pilots) retiring in the next five years alone. This trend will peak in 2029, when an additional 57% of commercially-rated pilots will reach mandatory retirement age compared to 2024.² This wave of retirements, coupled with hiring challenges due to an insufficient number of new pilot certifications, underscores an urgent need to streamline the certification process for new pilots by more effectively utilizing DPEs.

In 2022 and 2023, major airlines hired 25,321 pilots. In the same time period, DPEs only certified 20,716 new pilots, resulting in a nearly 5,000-pilot shortfall.³ Airlines are resorting to hiring pilots who already hold Airline Transport Pilot certifications and are closer to retirement age. With 16,000 pilots expected to retire in the next five years, the deficit between airline hiring needs and available, newly-certified, commercially-rated new pilots will only grow.

Regional airlines, which serve 93% of the nation's airports and are the *only* source of scheduled air service to 64% of the nation's airports. The post-pandemic pilot shortage has impacted them most severely, leading to significantly fewer cities being served by these carriers.

¹ https://www.faa.gov/data_research/aviation_data_statistics/civil_airmen_statistics

² Regional Airline Association. (n.d.). The pilot Shortage & Small Community Air Service trends ...
<https://www.raa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2Q24-Small-Community-Air-Service-Deck.pdf> Page 4

³ Regional Airline Association. (n.d.). The pilot Shortage & Small Community Air Service trends ...
<https://www.raa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2Q24-Small-Community-Air-Service-Deck.pdf> Page 7

As a consequence of these recent trends:

- 43 of 50 states have fewer available flights than pre-pandemic levels.⁴
- 317 airports in the contiguous 48 states have lost air service compared to pre-pandemic levels, with 12 airports losing all service and 37 losing at least 50% of their service.⁵
- Over 400 airplanes are now parked and unused.⁶
- Service has been discontinued in 119 markets⁷, resulting in fewer flights and higher prices

SkyWest Airlines, the largest regional airline in the U.S., highlighted during its earnings call on April 24, 2024, that they are operating with 1,900 fewer pilots than what is needed to fully operate their fleet and service secondary air travel markets.⁸ This situation emphasizes the need for an additional 20,000 or more pilots to be trained in the next five years simply to meet the rising demand.

Despite these pressing needs, the FAA has not shown the urgency required to support the pilot training industry. While pilot test applications have doubled, the number of active DPEs has remained flat over the last decade. This leads to extended wait times of anywhere from four to eight weeks or more for practical tests, significantly delaying the entry of new pilots into the workforce and increasing costs for aspiring pilots.

Section 833(d)(2)(F) of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 requires the FAA to determine how many DPEs are available to perform pilot certification tests and identify ways to effectively reduce test wait times for pilot examinations. We urge the FAA to either fully utilize all 900 currently staffed DPEs or find additional staff. FAA must address these critical issues with the urgency they demand, ensuring that our nation can meet its current and future aviation needs.

Given the critical state of FAA's pilot certification system, please provide responses to the following questions by October 25, 2024:

- How is the FAA addressing the requirements set forth in Section 833 to better utilize and coordinate its DPEs?
- How are you ensuring the FAA is fully utilizing its current roster of DPEs?
- What steps are you taking to reduce the extended wait times for pilot certification exams?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your prompt action and response.

Sincerely,

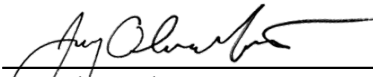
⁴ <https://www.raa.org/pilot-supply-raa-corrects-the-record-again/>

⁵ *Id*

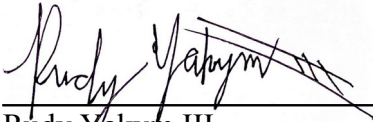
⁶ *Id*

⁷ Regional Airline Association. (n.d.). The pilot Shortage & Small Community Air Service trends ... <https://www.raa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2Q24-Small-Community-Air-Service-Deck.pdf> Pages 13-16

⁸ <https://www.insidermonkey.com/blog/skywest-inc-nasdaqskyw-q1-2024-earnings-call-transcript-1294475/?singlepage=1>



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Member of Congress



Rudy Yakym III
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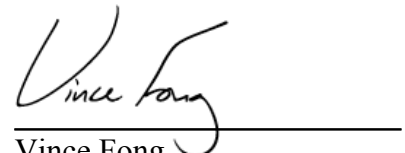
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