

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Anthony Clare
Chargé d'Affaires
U.S. Mission to ICAO
Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3C 5J9

Dear Secretary Blinken and Chargé d'Affaires Clare:

We are writing to urge the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Mission to the International Civil Aviation Organization (USICAO) to actively participate in and support the effort—along with other ICAO member states—to raise the mandatory commercial pilot retirement age standard. The American public deserves the most qualified and experienced pilots when traveling.

During the 14th Air Navigation Conference held this year from August 26th to September 6th, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) advanced formal action directed at raising or even eliminating the institution's *recommended* pilot retirement age of 65 years.¹ This initiative—led by Canada, Australia, Brazil, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the International Air Transport Association—makes it increasingly likely that the international community will move to increase the suggested retirement age in the near future. Such a move would be consistent with data from around the world, which confirm that experienced pilots have fewer accidents than junior pilots.² Therefore, it would stand to reason that raising or eliminating the pilot retirement age—coupled with the existing rigorous technical and medical testing that pilots undergo—would result in a reduction of accidents by closing the experience gap and retaining the greatest level of experience our passengers expect on the flight deck. In fact, many countries around the world already allow pilots above the age of 65 to fly and have been doing so without compromising safety.³

The United States is one of ICAO's largest member states and one of 36 states that make up the ICAO Council. The USICAO is tasked with improving the safety, security, and sustainability of civil aviation in the U.S., and, as such, has an obligation to advocate for changes to international standards to benefit American consumers and our dominance in the skies. Therefore, the USICAO should not spend this debate sitting on the sidelines. If the United States cedes our leadership role in this space on the international stage, we know that China—who is presently and actively joining


¹ Int'l Civil Aviation Org. [ICAO], *Leveraging Technology and Oversight Activities to Assess Pilot Age Limit*, ICAO Doc. AN-Conf/14-WP/106 (June 28, 2024), https://www.icao.int/Meetings/anconf14/Documents/WP/wp_106_pdf.

² Guohua Li, et al., *Age, Flight Experience, and Risk of Crash Involvement in a Cohort of Professional Pilots*, 157 *Am. J. Epidemiol.* 10, 874 (2003).


³ Rajesh Singh & Allison Lampert, *Focus: US Airline Pilots Fight Their Unions to Increase Retirement Age*, REUTERS (Aug. 22, 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/us-airline-pilots-fight-their-unions-increase-retirement-age-2023-08-22/>.


our partners to advocate for raising the pilot retirement age—will gladly fill that void. We urge you to actively participate in this important process and support raising ICAO’s standard for the pilot retirement age.

Sincerely,


Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator


John Thune
United States Senator


Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator


Mark Kelly
United States Senator


Joe Manchin
United States Senator

cc: Secretary Pete Buttigieg
Administrator Michael Whitaker