



# Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO

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**"AMERICA'S FIGHTING DEMOCRATIC UNION"**

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August 7, 2020

Steve Dickson  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Administrator Dickson:

On behalf of more than 1,000 airline dispatchers represented by the Transport Workers Union of America, I am writing to seek clarity on the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) recent decision to allow airlines to require some dispatchers to work from home. This decision appears to have been taken outside of the normal course of safety oversight with no input from the frontline workers who will be responsible for implementing it. We are gravely concerned that this decision will lower the safety of our airspace and urge you to reconsider both the decision itself and the process that led to it.

In mid-June and early August, respectively, SkyWest Airlines and Republic Airlines received amendments to their operating specifications under A008 which allow these airlines to assign a percentage of dispatchers to work from home "due to the effects of COVID-19". These changes are set to expire six months after being approved, but, presumably, could be extended at the FAA's discretion. Inserting these amendments into the operations specifications for these carriers precluded any public comment period or consultation with the dispatcher workforce – normally an essential part of the FAA's decision-making process. SkyWest and Republic have each taken steps to begin forcing their dispatchers to work from home and we expect that some flights will be dispatched remotely in the coming days.

Had the FAA conducted outreach to the dispatchers themselves, they would have found strong opposition to this decision. While our members, just as other essential employees, continue to face increased exposure to the virus by going to work each day, they are also airline safety professionals charged with maintaining the safety of our airspace. As an integral part of our aviation system, dispatchers maintain joint operational authority with pilots in command. They track and analyze meteorological conditions, maintenance status and limitations of aircraft, navigational facilities, airport conditions, and alternate landing sites before and during flight. To accomplish these duties, dispatchers utilize numerous resources within their operations center – including other staff members on site - to ensure aircraft arrive at their destinations without incident. It is unclear which, if any, of these duties can be performed effectively from a remote location. Furthermore, if a safe remote system can be designed for dispatchers to work from home, transitioning immediately to such a system without training or an updated set of standard operating procedures, as is now being demanded at SkyWest and Republic, is a recipe for disaster.

Requiring dispatchers to work from home raises significant safety questions. We request the FAA immediately answer the following questions in order to clarify the expectations of our members, our companies, and the FAA itself in implementing this change. While this list is long, we do not believe *any* of these questions have been addressed in the communications from either the FAA nor our employers to-date and each raises a unique and vital safety concern.

- What oversight will the FAA excise to ensure that at-home workstations are meeting the requirements of 14 CFR 121.99, including access to an uninterrupted power supply? If an at-home workstation does not or cannot meet these minimums due to the location of a dispatcher's home or their local infrastructure, will the FAA bar the air carrier from assigning that dispatcher to work from home? Does the FAA expect each air carrier to provide at-home workstations capable of meeting federal minimums to each dispatcher?
- What steps are necessary to secure dispatchers' homes to a level consistent with FAA and TSA requirements for safety-sensitive personnel and equipment? What steps are necessary to secure dispatchers' workstations and internet infrastructure from cyber threats? Is the airline or the dispatcher responsible for maintaining these levels? If it is a shared responsibility, which party is responsible for which aspects?
- How will FAA inspectors, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officials, and Aircraft Operator Security Coordinators perform their duties with regard to at-home dispatchers?

- What distraction mitigation procedures does the FAA believe need to be in place for at-home dispatchers? Will the airlines be responsible for establishing and enforcing these practices? What role does the FAA see itself playing to ensure distraction does not become a safety concern for at-home dispatchers?
- Will the FAA identify dispatchers' homes as mobile unit under an aeronautical enroute station? Will dispatchers be required to maintain commercial RTO certificates to perform their duties at home?
- How will drug and alcohol testing be conducted for at-home dispatchers? What standard will be used to establish "reasonable suspicion" before testing individuals?
- Has the FAA approved changes to these air carriers' safety management systems to account for operational changes necessitated by moving dispatchers to a remote location? What other steps has the FAA taken to ensure that this change will not have a domino effect to other safety-related regulations?

In order to ensure that the safety of our air system is never in doubt, we ask that the FAA delay any air carriers from moving dispatchers to a remote location until these issues have been fully addressed.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mike Mayes".

Mike Mayes

Air Division Director

Transport Workers Union of America