

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 21, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Mr. Chris Rocheleau
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

The Honorable Daniel Driscoll
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101

Dear Secretary Duffy, Acting Administrator Rocheleau, Secretary Hegseth, and Secretary Driscoll:

Following last week's release of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)'s preliminary report on the tragic midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport ("National Airport") on January 29, 2025, we write to express renewed concerns and echo NTSB's call for permanent changes to address contributing factors to this collision.

This collision and its aftermath are among the most devastating events in our region in recent history and have left families and entire communities in mourning. This event has also instilled unease and uncertainty for many in the flying public. America's airspace has long been the safest in the world—many Americans have never witnessed such an accident during their lifetime. It is now the federal government's task to ensure that the American public has no need for fear and does not witness another accident like this in their lifetimes.

We commend the NTSB on its dedication to this investigation and on its thoroughness. Chair Homendy and her team have been excellent partners to all parties involved, including Congress, federal departments and agencies, and the families and loved ones of the victims. We appreciate NTSB's dedication to this investigation, and believe this preliminary report lays the groundwork necessary to begin making necessary safety changes in the airspace surrounding National Airport.

We echo Chair Homendy's concern that the history of close proximity incidents at National Airport and this collision at National Airport demonstrate an "intolerable risk to aviation safety." We want to highlight that between October 2021 and December 2024, there were 15,214 close proximity events that triggered a resolution advisory from the traffic collision avoidance system (TCAS), and 85 incidents where aircraft were within less than 1,500 ft of lateral separation and

under 200 feet of vertical separation.¹ Despite these numbers, there was no significant, long-term response to prevent future occurrences until this report. We are also particularly alarmed by the close proximity of helicopter Route 4's flight path to the landing path for aircraft using runway 33, which could result in the aircraft traveling within 75 feet of each other.² We concur with NTSB in its findings, which read:

“Existing separation distances between helicopter traffic operating on Route 4 and aircraft landing on runway 33 are insufficient and pose an intolerable risk to aviation safety by increasing the chances of a midair collision.

When Route 4 operations are prohibited as recommended in Safety Recommendation A-25-1, it is critical for public safety helicopter operations to have an alternate route for operating in and around Washington, DC, without increasing controller workload.”³

We resoundingly support NTSB's recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to take the following actions:

1. Prohibit operations on helicopter Route 4 between Hains Point and the Wilson Bridge when runways 15 and 33 are being used for departures and arrivals, respectively, at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.
2. Designate an alternative helicopter route that can be used to facilitate travel between Hains Point and the Wilson Bridge when that segment of Route 4 is closed.⁴

Secretary Duffy: we appreciate your prompt response to the NTSB's preliminary report and adoption of the NTSB's preliminary recommendations, including by closing helicopter Route 4. We have provided additional insights in this letter to guide your further implementation of the recommendations. We look forward to partnering with you on this endeavor.

The airspace around National Airport is oversaturated—this has become abundantly clear by both the NTSB preliminary report and years of reports of near miss encounters within National Airport's airspace.⁵ Prohibiting helicopter traffic within the immediate area adjacent to National Airport is a necessary safety measure to protect American lives. And while we agree with the recommendation to consider alternate flight routes for helicopter traffic, we believe that this recommendation should not result in relocating helicopter traffic over nearby residential areas. We request that the FAA keep Congress apprised of and involved with the planning process when evaluating and selecting an alternative helicopter route.

¹ National Transportation Safety Board, “[Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report: DCA25MA108](#),” page 18.

² National Transportation Safety Board, “[Aviation Investigation Report AIR-25-01: Deconflict Airplane and Helicopter Traffic in the Vicinity of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport](#),” March 7, 2025, page 6.

³ National Transportation Safety Board, “[Aviation Investigation Report AIR-25-01: Deconflict Airplane and Helicopter Traffic in the Vicinity of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport](#),” March 7, 2025, page 8.

⁴ National Transportation Safety Board, “[Aviation Investigation Report AIR-25-01: Deconflict Airplane and Helicopter Traffic in the Vicinity of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport](#),” March 7, 2025, page 9.

⁵ Duncan, Ian, Daniel Gilbert, Michael Laris, Lori Aratani, & Andrew Ba Tran, “Pilots got 100 collision warnings for helicopters near National in past decade,” *Washington Post*, 13 February 2025.

We believe that decreasing the volume of helicopter traffic in the region would alleviate congestion in the airspace and an overburdened air traffic system, and prevent potential conflicts derived from redirected aircraft. We request the FAA and the Department of Defense permanently reduce significant aviation traffic within the region surrounding National Airport, short of emergency response services. To the maximum extent practicable, military training flights should be conducted outside the National Capital Region. When training necessitates use of routes within the region, they should be conducted in strict compliance with the timing constraints NTSB recommended and alternate routes that FAA will provide, or avoid using Route 4 altogether and instead use other FAA-approved preexisting routes to circumvent the airport. VIP travel can often be feasibly substituted for vehicular travel or flight paths that route further outside of the region, and other helicopter flights are simply not necessary to complete within this oversaturated airspace. As we await more clarity in the forthcoming NTSB full investigation, we request that the Department of Defense require pilots within the National Capital Region to use ADS-B Out, and to limit permissible exceptions to such requirement.

We also request that the FAA and NTSB review the existing flight volume in and out of National Airport, to ensure that the current volume of flights is compatible with the workload that our aviation safety personnel can handle. While moving helicopter traffic further from National Airport would alleviate some burden on aviation safety personnel, we remain concerned by historical near miss statistics identified by the NTSB report and by the lower than recommended number of air traffic controllers currently working at National Airport. We must ensure that the volume of flights is manageable for our aviation safety systems, and does not cause compounded delays pushing flights into unnecessarily late hours and causing further complications. National Airport's aviation safety personnel and systems must be able to reasonably accommodate the airport's flight volume within normal flight hours.

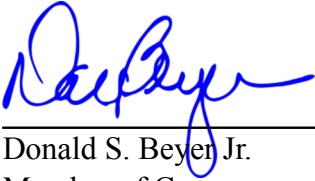
Finally, NTSB found that helicopter routes have "no defined lateral boundaries and are drawn to depict linear paths along defined surface features in a manner legible to flight crews."⁶ This lack of any lateral parameters on current routes allows operators to deviate close to National Airport runways on Routes 1 and 4 and over residential areas while traversing the other routes. We request that FAA conduct a review of Routes 1 and 4 over the river, and all helicopter routes in the National Capital Region with a specific focus on lateral dimensions.

The NTSB preliminary report documents the confluence of circumstances under which this tragic collision occurred. We stand ready to support NTSB as it continues its full investigation of the root causes of this collision. The federal government's work in response to this collision will be far from finished even when these preliminary recommendations are adopted. It is imperative that we begin to act now to prevent the known dangers of an overcrowded airspace and close proximity of airplane flight paths and helicopter routes from contributing to a future collision.

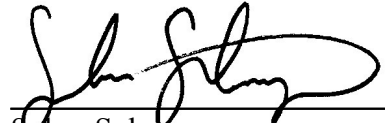
We request a briefing by March 31st to discuss the implementation of these recommendations. We thank you for your collaboration, and in advance, for your swift actions to protect our aviation safety.

⁶ National Transportation Safety Board, "[Aviation Investigation Report AIR-25-01: Deconflict Airplane and Helicopter Traffic in the Vicinity of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport](#)," March 7, 2025, page 4.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



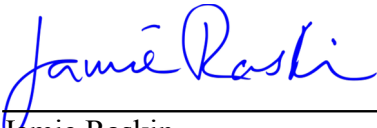
Suhas Subramanyam
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Andre Carson
Member of Congress



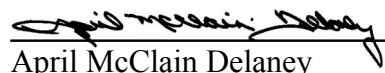
Jamie Raskin
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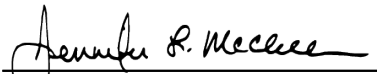
Steny H. Hoyer
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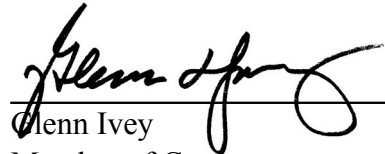
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CC:

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