

**Remarks of Julie Frederick
Association of Professional Flight Attendants
Before the
Advisory Committee for Aviation Consumer Protection Meeting
Space Allocated Per Passenger on Aircraft
April 14, 2015**

Good morning Members of the Advisory Committee. I am here as a representative of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants. The APFA represents the world's largest air carrier and is the largest main line flight attendant union in the world, with over 25,000 flight attendants. I am pleased to appear before you today to offer a flight attendant's perspective regarding safety and health concerns relative to the space allocated for customers on board passenger aircraft.

We believe we are at a crossroads regarding passenger travel and the customer experience. Driven by the past economic realities of aviation travel, experiences for the coach economy passenger today is often a negative one that increasingly affects safety and security, as well as the overall customer traveling experience.

Seat pitch – that is, as you know, the distance between a seat and the seat either in front of or behind another seat – used to be 34 inches. Since deregulation, the air carriers have steadily reduced the seating space for economy passengers as they have increased passenger density. What was once the norm – 34 inches of pitch – is now considered “comfort class or main cabin extra” and comes only at a premium. The gradual shrinking of personal seat space has been accompanied by a new discipline by management on load factors so that more and more flights

are full. That is good for our companies' bottom line but the days of the empty middle seat are a thing of the past.

When we discuss safety and health issues related to space allocated to customers, the number one issue is egress. During what is considered the "critical phases of flight", taxi, take off, and landing; there are two primary reasons why flight attendants request that passengers keep those seats up—to keep injuries to a minimum during a crash and to clear the maximum amount of space for a quick exit.

Can passengers safely evacuate an aircraft in less than 90 seconds in emergency situations? The FAA, in its certification of new aircraft, require that manufacturers conduct both computer simulations and actual aircraft evacuation showing that the fully loaded aircraft can be emptied in 90 seconds with half of the exits blocked. As flight attendants, we have demonstrated our ability to evacuate our aircraft in the 90-second timeframe in training exercises, but we have seen problems in the real world where passengers have not followed instructions: leaving carry-on luggage beneath their feet, not securely buckling their seat belts and being completely unaware of where their closest exit is located. This lack of attention is exacerbated by the use of electronic devices on both takeoff and landing.

While there has never been a documented accident in the United States where seat pitch and leg room have been identified as a contributing factor, a 2013 Canadian Safety Board study showed that real evacuation emergencies may often exceed the 90 second rule. This indicates to me that on-going analysis and more rigorous testing is needed to ensure that the required 90 second evacuation can be met each and every time.

We know the importance of the brace position. This position requires that passengers bend over, heads down, arms under their legs. With the new industry standard, it pushes the limits for a passenger to be able to assume the preferred brace position. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) did extensive research on passenger brace positions in the 1980s and determined that flight attendants can help passengers survive aircraft accidents with fewer and less serious injuries when they are able to instruct them on the proper brace position.

The traveling public almost universally bemoans today's coach or economy experience. Most U.S airlines now charge for checked baggage so we have seen a definite increase in carry on baggage. People compete for carry on baggage space and frankly it's the bane of a flight attendant's existence when we hear someone say, "It'll fit". One can go to any number of web sites and read a litany of complaints or anecdotes, many of which highlight an "air rage" incident. Some are now referring to it as the "Legroom Wars".

One researcher stated, "... Today's airplanes are configured for rage." While I can't agree with this, unquestionably, flight attendants at American Airlines have seen an increase in air rage and passenger misconduct incidents that does correlate to the reduction in the personal space of passengers.

We know these incidents are under reported, and we also know that they are increasing. Diffusion techniques are now a standard part of our recurrent training. Unfortunately for the FAA and the industry, it will likely take a high profile incident for remedial action to occur. We recommend to the FAA that they step up enforcement as a deterrent.

Finally, I did want to discuss health events on loaded aircraft and the flight attendant's ability to respond. Flight attendants are well trained to handle a wide variety of medical incidents and emergencies, and it is a good thing that we are. At American, we are seeing upwards of 25 medical incidents a day in which flight attendants had to take action. Flight attendants face serious challenges in a full aircraft – sometimes just reaching the passenger in need, let alone finding the space to isolate or treat the passenger. Every day in the United States, among all carriers, there are over 50 medical emergencies on scheduled aircraft with 7% resulting in diversions and unscheduled landings. As our population ages these types of events are only going to increase.

In closing, let me say that the roles and responsibilities of flight attendants are expanding every year. From security, to safety to emergency medical interventions, flight attendants are asked to do it all. We know all too well that we are the last line of defense on both sides of the cockpit door.

As high density seating increases, we believe that both the regulators and the air carriers' management must look closely at the cause and effect that “packing them in” has on safety, health and security – not just on the customer experience, and they need to consult regularly with flight attendants as they consider further actions.

This completes my testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

