



Association of Professional Flight Attendants

*Proudly Representing the **Flight Attendants** of American Airlines*

Office of the National President

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor of the State of North Carolina
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-0301

Dear Governor Cooper:

As safety professionals and aviation's first responders, the top priority for Flight Attendants is ensuring the safety of our passengers. Despite many sectors of the economy shutting down, flight crew have been deemed 'essential workers' required to facilitate the transport of critical goods and services as part of the effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of this responsibility means that we come in contact with hundreds of people in airports and on airplanes in a single day.

Per DHS, the Aviation Transportation Sector has been classified as Critical Infrastructure under 42 U.S.C. §5195c(e). American Airlines provides critical air transportation services of the Aviation Transportation Sector, including the movement of passengers, commodities and goods necessary for the safety, security and well-being of individuals around the world.

Since Chinese officials notified international health officials of the coronavirus on December 31, 2019, over 430,000 people have landed in the United States on direct flights from China. The United States and Chinese governments jointly estimate that in the two months following the mid-January grounding of direct flights from China, another 40,000 travelers originating in China were able to enter the US through non-direct means. COVID-19 was confirmed to have originated in China, and *we know that air travel has been the main mode in which the virus spread into and throughout the United States.*

Hundreds of American Airlines Flight Attendants have tested positive for COVID-19 and this number continues to grow. With a workforce of 27,000 Flight Attendants, the percentage of confirmed cases among our ranks is significantly higher than that of the general public. The

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casual relationship is not surprising as our job requires us to share the airplane cabin with The passengers. Flight Attendants need to be covered under workers' compensation law for the inordinate degree of risk we must assume in our profession.

Our Flight Attendants nearly had to beg American Airlines for permission to wear face masks. Our crewmembers were, in fact, prohibited *and disciplined* for wearing masks until March 22. It took several more weeks for our airline to agree to provision them for our Flight Attendants. American Airlines finally required crewmembers to wear masks beginning May 1 yet passengers will not be requirement until May 11. The right to wear barrier masks during a public health crisis is something which we should have never had to fight for. The airlines and the FAA should have an obligation to ensure that every single crewmember has the necessary protective equipment needed to stay safe.

Face masks have yet to be enforced for all passengers. We know that masks are less about protecting wearer, and more about protecting others around you. The system is most effective when *everyone* wears a mask. To protect the health and safety of crewmembers, passengers on the airplane and in the terminal need to be required to wear masks. Sadly, our members have reported incidents were passengers have intentionally put flight crew at risk. One such example happened when an irate passenger imitated coughing directly in the face of one of our Flight Attendants.

CDC guidelines instruct our citizens not to gather in groups, to stay out of crowded places, avoid mass gatherings, and to keep 6-feet of distance from other people, even when wearing a face covering. These guidelines cannot be followed the same way on an aircraft. While masks can help stymie the spread of the contagion, they do not completely eradicate the risk of contracting the virus. The masks we have access to are known as 'barrier masks.' In the face of a supply chain shortage, the more protective N95 masks have been reserved for our healthcare professionals. Barriers masks do not guarantee our health and safety, but they are the best option that flight crew have right now.

While CDC recommendations are very clear, thus far the FAA directive for flight crew safety has been dangerously insufficient. Terms such as "whenever feasible" and "to the extent possible" are not strong enough to ensure our safety. Safety guidance needs to be mandated, not recommended, particularly when lives are at risk. Our regulatory agencies have not implemented a uniform federal requirement for masks and aviation safety during this public health emergency. Rather, the airlines have slowly reacted via a patchwork approach that has left us exposed. With flight schedules reduced, the passenger load factor on each flight has increased. Our members encounter sometimes hundreds of people in just a single flight. A uniform seating and boarding policy across all airlines would also help keep passengers and Flight Attendants socially distanced from each other, as recommended by the CDC. So far, these policy changes have not been enacted.

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The CDC also recommends that any citizen who has been exposed or possibly exposed to the coronavirus must self-quarantine for 14 days. This recommendation has not applied to flight crew, who must interact with more people in a single day than most other professions currently still in operation. As part of our duties, we do not have the ability to come home after work but must instead travel in vans to layover hotels. Every moment our job requires us to be away from our own homes increases our risk of contracting the virus. The duties specified by the Flight Attendant profession greatly increase opportunities for exposure to this virus.

As essential workers, we are required by our employer to report for work. We cannot work from home or isolate at home. We do our best to maintain distance between ourselves, our coworkers, and our passengers, but there is only so much space in the aircraft cabin. If we do contract the virus, we need to know that we are covered by workers' compensation laws. Though our company is providing us with a 14-day pandemic leave to isolate following exposure, in select instances this is not a sufficient timeframe to recover from the virus. The lost work hours due to contracting and convalescing from COVID-19 should fully qualify our workgroup to receive workers' compensation benefits.

Flight Attendants are frontline workers and first responders, and we are proud to play our part in helping to curb this pandemic. We understand that there is risk involved in transporting critical goods and emergency personnel to hot zones, but still we have an essential role to fulfill. Should our own health and safety be jeopardized, we must be protected from the workplace risks we assume as part of our everyday employment. We urge you to make an emergency exception to include Flight Attendants in workers' compensation coverage.

Sincerely,



Julie Hedrick

cc: Phillip A. Baddour, III, NC Industrial Commission