



# **Association of Professional Flight Attendants**

Submission for the Record  
for the  
**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**

On  
**“On the Front Lines: The Impacts of COVID-19 on Transportation Workers”**  
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## **Protecting Health and Safety on our Airplanes through COVID-19**

The Association of Professional Flight Attendants, representing the mainline Flight Attendants at American Airlines, continues to express concern over the lack of consistent health and safety standards during the COVID-19 pandemic and in future health crisis. The first thing that is clear is that there is essentially no national policy covering what is or is not safe behaviors for air travel. DOT and HHS have deliberately avoided mandating national standards and in turn this has led to a patchwork approach across the aviation industry. Passengers are left unsure of which policy applies to which airline and what the safest practices on board an aircraft actually are. The lack of a consistent policy has put both passengers and crew members at needless risk and exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

While airlines in the U.S. have “voluntarily” implemented individual safety policies, without an industry-wide mandate, the recommendations from CDC cannot be followed or enforced. When the outbreak began, Flight Attendants were deemed essential frontline workers and our objective is always to keep our passengers and ourselves safe. The health and safety of both the flying public and crew would be best served by a single uniform federal mandate that sets consistent science-based standards throughout the aviation industry. The FAA’s long-standing policy of “one level of safety” should apply to the pandemic response as it does to broader aviation safety concerns.

As Flight Attendants, not only do we spend many hours on airplanes, but we also walk through different airport terminals and see the differences in policies between them. Some have digital signs reminding passengers about social distancing, wearing masks, and hand washing. Others provide hand sanitizer and reiterate safety precautions at the gate via announcements. One airline has committed to keeping the middle seats open to provide more distancing between passengers.

American Airlines has set its own policies. We have fewer signs than other airlines at check-in and we use announcements at the gate to remind passengers of our policies. Tape on the floor shows people how to stand six feet apart and one-time use hand sanitizer wipes are provisioned. American has committed to blocking 50% of the middle seats—most of the time. As you can see, the policies from airline to airline vary. Do these variances make one airline or one airport safer than another? What happened to “one level of safety”?

These policy changes are half-hearted and are not strong enough to ensure safety to the fullest extent possible. Health and safety guidance must be mandated and enforced, not recommended, particularly when lives are at risk. These decisions need to be based on science, not profit or convenience.

Specifically, we ask:

- How are we to ensure CDC recommended social distancing onboard the aircraft for passengers and crewmembers?
- Does enhanced cleaning of the aircraft combat the virus successfully?
- Should wearing a mask be mandatory and enforceable for everyone onboard the aircraft?
- Do HEPA filters on aircraft help contain the spread of the virus?

What happens when a passenger refuses to wear a face covering? Flight Attendants are instructed to politely remind passengers to put on their masks and ensure the situation does not escalate. Often passengers get upset when their seatmates are not wearing masks. What do we do when de-escalation is not possible and conflict arises? We are already beginning to see how inconsistencies between airlines and the lack of an enforceable policy are creating the conditions that incite air rage. We need every airline, passenger, and aviation employee on the same page in order to safely combat this health crisis now and in the future.

## **Extending Payroll Support for Aviation Workers**

APFA, the largest independent Flight Attendant union, and all of our 27,000 Flight Attendants are grateful for Congress' support of the aviation industry through the CARES Act. The Payroll Support Program has been essential to keeping both our members employed and the airlines flying. Without it, we know that we would be many thousands less than the 27,000 we are today.

Tens of thousands of aviation workers in our country maintained their employment and their paychecks during these turbulent times. The ripple effect props up struggling local economies and other industries support by travel. Our members have stayed connected to their health insurance, off unemployment rolls, and paying income taxes. Our bills and our mortgages get paid and we avoid setting the economy back further. When this pandemic does subside, and passenger flights return to more normal levels, we will need our workforce ready to accommodate the increased demand. The Payroll Support Program was how Congress created a solution before our situation became a problem.

The CARES Act also came with vital protections for workers. APFA and our labor partners were adamant that workers, not executives, be prioritized in the legislation. The CARES Act placed limits on executive compensation and stock buybacks and mandated that taxpayer support helped frontline workers. Most importantly, the airlines that accepted government support were barred from furloughing employees through September 30<sup>th</sup>. These restrictions ensured that financial support actually reached the essential workers who are reporting to work during this public health emergency.

Airline management now has their eyes on that date, September 30<sup>th</sup>. This is when the lives of many aviation families might be turned upside down. This is when management could likely furlough tens of thousands of aviation workers. Our members are uneasy, not knowing what the future holds for our paychecks, our health benefits, and our families. We urge Congress to ensure our frontline workers are suddenly put on the streets. Congressional action will be needed in some form. Extending the Payroll Support Program would give the industry more time to recover. Indicators are showing that air travel is in fact picking up again. Once again, let's create the solution before the problem spirals out of control into avoidable and irreparable harm. If Flight Attendants are furloughed, many more thousands will be added to the unemployment line. Which way is better? We think the answer is obvious.

Thank you for supporting the thousands of aviation workers who work hard every day to keep our country moving.