

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 8, 2005

The Honorable Marion Blakey  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Federal Office Building 10A  
800 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey,

We write to express our opposition to the Federal Aviation Administration's plan to reduce expenses by eliminating midnight to 5:00 am staffing at 42 airport towers across the country, including three in New York – Greater Rochester, Albany, and Syracuse Hancock International Airports. We believe these nighttime closures not only pose a serious safety risk and potential inconvenience to thousands of passengers, but will save only a negligible amount of money. We respectfully request you retain nighttime staffing at New York's three airports and consider other means of managing air traffic controller staffing levels.

While we realize the serious situation the FAA faces as more than 12,000 air traffic controllers prepare for retirement over the next ten years, we believe the \$5 million the agency will save by these 42 nighttime tower closures does not justify putting millions of passengers at risk and disrupting airport operations nationwide.

Without air traffic controllers to monitor the skies from midnight to 5:00 am, any late or diverted flights might be unable to land. As we are sure you are aware, weather conditions in Upstate New York and elsewhere in the country can prove unpredictable and late landings are a frequent occurrence. And we understand that under the FAA's proposal, pilots would have to perform visual landings after midnight, without any on-airport tower staff providing guidance.

We do not believe the FAA should gamble with the lives of the traveling public as there is no way to know when in-flight emergencies, mechanical difficulties, weather conditions or any other unforeseen event will occur necessitating a landing at any of these airports. Under the FAA's plan, the Boston TRACON Center would cover the vast airspace surrounding these and other airports in the region, and would track late and diverted flights. We believe this places too great a burden on the already short-staffed Boston TRACON to bear.

In recent years, air travel has grown dramatically in Upstate New York, thanks to the advent of new low-cost carriers. Last year, Albany, Rochester and Syracuse Airports served a combined total of more than one million passengers. This has provided tremendous benefits to Upstate businesses and passengers. We fear these closures will deter carriers from expanding their services, especially those low-cost carriers that tend to schedule early morning and late night flights.

In conclusion, we respectfully urge you to consider other options before reducing nighttime tower staffing. We believe the FAA does not presently have enough controllers to monitor our busy skies, and believe further personnel cuts would be disastrous.

We have fought hard in Congress to increase funding for air traffic controller hiring and training, and hope that you will work with us to ensure that we hire enough well-trained and capable controllers over the next decade, rather than reducing their ranks. Right now, we believe the FAA's plan to will compromise the safety and efficiency of New York's, and the nation's, air traffic system.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer  
U.S. Senator



Hillary Rodham Clinton  
U.S. Senator