

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

December 11, 2023

Michael Whitaker
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Whitaker:

I write to you today regarding a critical issue that directly impacts every flight across the country and insures safety of our skies: pilot training and specifically, the lifesaving 1500-hour rule. As you may recall from our discussion in October 2023, the fatal crash of the Colgan Air Flight 3407 in Clarence, New York on February 12, 2009, took fifty lives and served as a tragic and devastating wakeup call to close the gaps in airline safety.

Immediately following the crash, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) found the tragedy largely caused by pilot inexperience, leading me to join the courageous families to work tirelessly to secure the passage of the Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administration Extension Act of 2010. The totality of the 2010 law's provisions has made the skies safer by putting the best pilots in the cockpit and setting them up for success. A key pillar of the law is pilot qualification standards, colloquially known as the 1,500-hour rule – requiring at least 1,500 hours of in-air training and experience, among other requirements, prior to prospective pilots earning their Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate. Following the passage of the law, FAA underwent a rulemaking process which further required first officers to hold an ATP, while allowing certain first officer applicants to qualify for a restricted ATP. Later in August 2013, the FAA mandated that pilots-in-command accumulate an additional 1000 hours of in air carrier operations to move from the first officer seat to the pilot-in-command seat.

Since the enactment of the 2010 law, there has not been a single fatal crash on a U.S. commercial airline – a public safety triumph we should all be proud of. Weakening or altering any of the law's key pillars can jeopardize the safety of our entire aviation system.

Following up on this clear success, I am writing to ensure that the proposed legislative language by Senators Thune and Duckworth in the current FAA Reauthorization Act would not impact, alter, erode, or change the 1500-hour rule in any way and would lead to more training. In order for clarity, understanding and peace of mind for me, the Colgan Families, and all air passengers across the country, I request an answer to the following question:

- Does this amendment impact, alter, erode, or change the 1500-hour rule in any way?
- Does this amendment give the FAA any new rulemaking authority to impact, alter, erode, or change the 1500-hour rule?

- Does this amendment reduce the number of in-air flight hours a pilot must gain to become a pilot or co-pilot for a U.S. Commercial Airline?
- Are there any new paths for R-ATP candidates to attain their R-ATP certificate as a net result of this amendment?

I appreciate your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Schumer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Charles" and last name "Schumer" clearly distinguishable.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator