

August 5, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

As the nation shifts from economic survival to recovery, we again face an acute shortage of aviation technicians that threatens the vitality of the U.S. aerospace sector and the safe, affordable and reliable air transportation system to which Americans are accustomed. The undersigned organizations, representing a broad cross-section of the aviation industry, seek your assistance and leadership in directing the federal government to use its full authority and influence to ensure a vibrant and sustainable aviation workforce.

The pandemic took an enormous economic toll on the aviation maintenance industry. While most companies survived thanks to rapid and generous relief from the federal government, many seasoned workers left the industry due to early retirement and buy-out packages. As air travel begins to approach pre-pandemic levels, those departures have only exacerbated a long-standing and well-documented workforce crisis.¹ Aviation technicians are retiring at a much faster rate than they are being replaced; new mechanics make up just 2 percent of the population annually, while 33 percent of the workforce is at or near retirement age.²

The mechanic shortage is affecting other sectors. Technician training schools report a persistent inability to hire and retain qualified faculty due to an absence of qualified personnel. Maintenance companies are turning away business, which in turn impacts the companies' ability to grow and the customers ability to operate aircraft.

With the foregoing in mind, we request the administration take the following actions:

1. Increase funding for FAA workforce grant programs. We urge the Administration to propose an expansion of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)'s Aviation Workforce Development Grants program in its FY 2023 budget request. Established by Sec. 625 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, this program provides grants to academia and the aviation community to help prepare a more inclusive talent pool of aviation maintenance technicians, airline mechanics, and pilots, and to inspire and recruit the next generation of aviation professionals. This program was massively oversubscribed with qualified applicants in its first year (more than 350 applications for just \$10 million); therefore, we recommend you double for both the maintenance and pilot grant programs from \$5 million in FY 2022 to \$10 million in FY 2023.

¹ "ARSA Finds Technician Shortage Costs Industry \$100 Million Per Month", Aeronautical Repair Station Association, May 14, 2019, <https://arsa.org/survey2019/>.

² "The 2019-2020 Pipeline Report", Aviation Technician Education Council, April 7, 2020 <https://www.atec-amt.org/pipeline-report.html>.

2. Facilitate military to civilian career transition. Our country is doing a very poor job of aiding exiting military service members with relevant aircraft maintenance and other technical experience in pursuing civilian aviation careers. Of the more than 22,000 service members with such training that separated from the Air Force and Navy, only ten percent obtained civilian mechanic certification, a travesty likely attributable to the barrier of having to submit to more than a year of redundant academic training in order to qualify for such certification. We therefore urge you to improve the military to civilian transition policies at the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and the FAA. A forthcoming proposed Executive Order would harmonize FAA aviation maintenance certification requirements with active-duty aviation maintenance technician training programs to support civilian career pathways for recently separated service members that are consistent with knowledge, experience and skill gained during military service.
3. Support the bipartisan National Center for the Advancement of Aviation Act (S. 1752 and H.R. 3482). The legislation, which was sponsored by Sens. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Mis.) and Reps. André Carson (D-Ind.), Don Young (R-Ak.) and Rick Larsen (D-Wash.), would charter a national, independent, non-government forum to facilitate collaboration and cooperation between all sectors of aviation and aerospace and related stakeholders to coordinate, promote, and support the future of aviation. Funded by a small portion of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, this National Center would focus on four key areas: aviation and aerospace STEM curriculum, workforce development, economic and safety data and research sharing, and cross-disciplinary collaboration.
4. Message positively about transportation careers. The lack of aviation career awareness is also adversely affecting student recruitment efforts, as two out of every five seats in mechanic training programs remain empty. Similarly, well-paying jobs are going unfilled because many are unaware of the opportunities in the aviation maintenance sector, which employs more than 200,000 Americans and contributes \$50 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Our industry is not alone. We therefore urge support for initiatives like the bipartisan Promoting Service in Transportation Act (S. 1681 and H.R. 3310), which would provide resources to the Department of Transportation to promote transportation-centric careers.

These four initiatives would help address many facets of the aviation maintenance industry workforce crisis. However, we are not relying entirely on federal assistance. The aircraft maintenance community has aggressively partnered with and invested in training and education programs across the country to bolster the capacity to meet our domestic workforce needs. In addition, we have adopted internal workforce policies to retain and invest in the skills of our current employees as we have also continuously adjusted our compensation policies in a rapidly changing globally competitive environment.

Put simply, while the industry is doing a great deal, we cannot fully address this challenge without your leadership as a President who understands the needs of the American working class. We look forward to working with you and your Administration.

Respectfully,

