

December 11, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
U.S. Senate  
141 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dan Sullivan  
U.S. Senate  
302 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Baldwin and Sullivan,

Thank you for your leadership efforts in addressing pilot supply issues and the introduction of the Flight Education Access Act (S. 1292). This legislation is a critical component for expanding the pilot pipeline.

As organizations representing a broad range of aviation stakeholders, we write to express our strong support for the bipartisan Flight Education Access Act. By increasing the amount of federal student loan aid available to individuals enrolled in accredited flight education and training programs, this bill will make it possible for more people, especially those not well represented in the profession, to pursue their dream of becoming a pilot. This legislation will also help ensure that the commercial aviation industry can meet the robust long-term demand for air service across the country.

Despite our collective efforts to grow the pipeline, the high cost of flight education and training remains the chief barrier for individuals wishing to pursue the pilot career path. According to the University Aviation Association, collegiate flight training typically adds on average \$80,000 in additional expenses to a two- and four-year degree. With the average cost of tuition and fees at a public, in-state institution for a bachelor's degree being approximately \$40,000,<sup>1</sup> this translates to at least \$120,000 for a professional pilot degree. Unlike graduate students who can borrow student loans up to the cost of attendance to support their professional studies and certifications, individuals enrolled in flight education and training programs are capped at an undergraduate student loan ceiling of \$57,500 for an independent student and \$31,000 for a dependent student. And, even if the individual qualifies for the maximum yearly Pell Grant award of \$7,395, there remains a substantial aid gap relative to the cost of attendance for flight schools. Most students and their families do not have the means or strong enough credit for expensive private loans, and even the Parent Plus Program is not feasible for many. By increasing the amount of student loan aid for individuals enrolled in accredited programs, the Flight Education Access Act will help to close this aid gap and finally make the pilot profession accessible to all.

There has never been a better and more critical time to become a pilot. Demand for pilots is expected to be robust for years to come. While the career path is expensive, the return on investment is high. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median salary for airline pilots is approximately \$211,000 per year as of 2022.<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of the completion rate will help ensure that students are

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/articles/paying-for-college-infographic>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/transportation-and-material-moving/airline-and-commercial-pilots.htm#tab-5>

receiving a high-quality education and that only students who have a high likelihood of graduating are allowed to advance beyond initial training, preventing students from being saddled with unnecessary debt.

A robust aviation industry requires a steady supply of high-quality pilots. This bipartisan bill puts forward a commonsense solution to make the pilot career track more accessible. Again, thank you for your leadership on this this critical piece of legislation. We fully support your bill and are ready to assist in helping to move the Flight Education Access Act through Congress and to the President's desk.

Sincerely,

Airlines for America  
American Association of Airport Executives  
Cargo Airline Association  
Flight School Association of North America  
Global Business Travel Association  
International Air Transport Association  
National Air Carrier Association  
National Association of State Aviation Officials  
National Business Aviation Association  
National Flight Training Association  
NetJets Association of Shared Aircraft Pilots  
Regional Air Cargo Carriers Association  
Regional Airline Association  
Southwest Airlines Pilot Association  
U.S. Travel Association  
University Aviation Association