

# Duckworth Touts Key Priorities Included In Committee-Passed Bipartisan FAA Reauthorization Bill

February 12 2024 8:53 AM



WASHINGTON, DC – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)—a member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation (CST) and Chair of the Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation—announced several of her key priorities were included in the bipartisan [FAA Reauthorization Act of 2023](#) that passed through the CST committee today. As one of the authors of the legislation, Duckworth successfully secured several provisions that will improve safety

for consumers, expand the aviation workforce and enhance protections for travelers with disabilities. If signed into law, the bipartisan FAA reauthorization bill would extend FAA’s funding and authorities through the Fiscal Year 2028.

“The bipartisan *FAA Reauthorization Act* is a win not only for our economy, but for aviation safety advocates and the flying public,” said Duckworth. “As Chair of the Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation, I’m so proud that this bill includes many of my priorities—including my *EVAC Act* and a provision that upholds strong pilot certification standards—to make flying safer and more accessible for all Americans. I’m grateful to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for working together to pass a strong, bipartisan bill through committee that helps modernize the FAA, creates jobs, boosts the aviation workforce, increases consumer protections and makes sure people with disabilities are treated with the dignity and respect all Americans deserve.”

This reauthorization is the result of successful bipartisan negotiations among the leadership of the Senate Commerce Committee between Chair Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Ranking Member Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Subcommittee Chair Duckworth and Subcommittee Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS).

Key priorities that Duckworth successfully included in the bill are listed below.

### **Increasing Aviation Workforce Development**

Building on the Duckworth-Moran bipartisan [\*Aviation Workforce Development Enhancement Act\*](#) in the *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2023*, the bill would increase annual funding levels for FAA Workforce Development Grants from the current \$10 million allotted per year to \$70 million per year to support institutions that train pilots and aviation mechanics. After introducing this bipartisan bill in December 2022, Senators Duckworth and Moran (R-KS) worked with Senators Klobuchar (D-MN), Thune (R-SC), Kelly (D-AZ), Fischer (R-NE), Warnock (D-GA) and Capito (R-WV) to expand support for this program and craft the bipartisan [\*Aviation Workforce Development Recruitment Act\*](#), which was also included in the Senate bipartisan FAA reauthorization bill.

### **Improving Aviation Emergency Evacuation Standards**

The recent incidents with Alaska Airlines and in Japan underscored the need to ensure FAA’s emergency evacuation standard is rooted in reality—especially after the latest simulation tests conducted by the FAA did not take into account carry-on baggage, children, seniors, people with disabilities and so many other factors that reflect typical flights today. The [\*Duckworth-Baldwin EVAC Act\*](#) included in this FAA reauthorization bill would require modernization and improvements to aircraft evacuation standards by

requiring the FAA to conduct a comprehensive study on aircraft evacuation and empanel a committee of experts and stakeholders—including representatives of the disability community, senior citizens and pediatricians—to evaluate gaps in current evacuations standards and operating procedures and make recommendations. Additionally, the FAA would be required to initiate a rulemaking on any recommendations the FAA Administrator deems appropriate. The FAA would also be required to report study findings, committee recommendations and the Administrator’s plan to implement any such recommendations.

## **Enhancing Passenger Safety by Ensuring Commercial Airlines Have Adequate Emergency Medical Kits On-Board**

Since 1986, the FAA regulations have mandated that all domestic passenger airplanes with a flight attendant have an emergency medical kit containing medications and devices onboard. Aircraft emergency medical kits (EMKs) are used onboard an aircraft in emergency medical situations and are required to contain equipment and medicines like a stethoscope, aspirin, antihistamine tablets, a CPR mask, among [other items](#). The 2018 FAA Reauthorization further required the FAA to evaluate regulations regarding emergency medical equipment on passenger aircraft. Yet, many key medications and medical equipment are still missing from EMKs. Duckworth led this bipartisan amendment, which is cosponsored by U.S. Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE), that would build on the 2018 FAA Reauthorization and require the FAA to review required contents of passenger aircraft emergency medical kits and relevant training for crew members once at least every five years.

## **Prioritizing Aviation Accessibility for All**

Duckworth led several efforts in this legislation to make travel easier and more accessible for people with disabilities, including:

1. ***Prioritizing Accountability and Accessibility for Aviation Consumers Act of 2023:*** requires the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) publish an annual report on how quickly, effectively and efficiently consumer complaints related to traveling with a disability are received, addressed and resolved by DOT.
2. ***Mobility Aids On Board Improve Lives and Empower All (MOBILE) Act:*** requires DOT issue an advisory circular that provides guidance to airlines on publishing information related to powered wheelchairs, including the dimensions of aircraft cargo holds, and evaluate the frequency and types of mishandling of mobility aids and take actions towards making in-flight wheelchair seating available.
3. ***Access and Dignity for All People who Travel (ADAPT) Act:*** requires DOT issue regulations regarding seating accommodations for passengers with disabilities that

takes into account being seated next to their companion and requires the Secretary of Transportation establish an optional Known Service Animal Travel Pilot Program, providing service animal users the opportunity to participate in a streamlined pre-registration process.

4. ***Equal Accessibility to Passenger Portals (Equal APP) Act***: requires DOT issue regulations to ensure that customer-facing websites, applications and information communication technologies (ICT) of airlines and airports are accessible. It would require the Secretary to conduct regular audits of such websites, applications and ICTs and allow the Secretary to hold non-compliant entities accountable by issuing civil penalties.
5. ***Store On-board Wheelchairs in Cabin (STOWIC) Act***: requires airlines provide information on the airline website—and anywhere people can make reservations—regarding the rights and responsibilities of both airlines and passengers as to the availability of on-board wheelchairs. It would also require annual staff training regarding assisting people with disabilities on the use of on-board wheelchairs and the right to request an on-board wheelchair. It would allow the Secretary to issue enhanced civil penalties if airlines fail to provide an on-board wheelchair.
6. ***Airport Accessibility Grants***: authorizes a pilot grant program to help airports make their facilities more accessible. The program would be funded at \$20 million per year from Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funds.

## **Safeguarding the 1,500-Hour Rule**

In 2009, Colgan Air flight 3407 crashed outside of Buffalo, New York, killing all 50 people onboard. Following this tragedy, Congress passed the *Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administrative Extension Act*, which required all flight crewmembers operating a commercial aircraft under Part 121 to hold an Air Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate and directed the FAA to update qualifications for such ATP certificates to include a minimum of 1,500 hours. The language gave FAA some flexibility in allowing exemptions for certain structured training programs provided they offer an equivalent level of safety. Despite strong efforts to roll back or weaken the 1,500-hour rule, Duckworth successfully defended the rule, thus helping ensure that pilots have high levels of training and are prepared in the case of life-threatening emergencies.