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United States Senate

February 8, 2016

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The Honorable Michael P. Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta,

I am writing to inquire what steps the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is taking with regard to hobbyist drone activity to ensure the safety of the airspace around airports in the Commonwealth and throughout the country. From November 2014 through August 2015, there have been several reported sightings of drones near Massachusetts airports.¹ Just last month on New Year's Day a commercial plane reportedly spotted a drone flying 700 feet in the air just one mile from Logan Airport.² These incidents have only heightened concerns about the safety and security of the airspace around the Commonwealth's airports. All it takes is one drone to fly into the path of one passenger jet and a disaster can ensue. We must take action before a catastrophe like this happens.

In 2015, an estimated 700,000 hobbyist drones were sold in the United States, which could present an ever-increasing danger in our skies. And once the FAA finalizes rules for larger commercial drones, which may fly out of the operator's sight, the risks of collision with manned aircraft will only grow. While there are many beneficial uses for drones, including spotting wildfires, examining crops, and maritime search and rescue, those benefits cannot come at the expense of safety.

As the steward of our nation's aviation safety, it is the FAA's responsibility to ensure that drones are safely operating within the national airspace. To do so, the FAA should educate drone operators about where they can fly drones, including requirements for hobbyist drone operators to notify air traffic control before flying within five miles of an airport. Further, the FAA should

¹ Federal Aviation Administration, *FAA Releases Pilot UAS Reports*, (Aug. 21, 2015), available at <https://www.faa.gov/news/updates/?newsId=83544>

² Laura Crimaldi, *Mass. State Police to Educate Public on Drones*, BOSTON GLOBE, (Jan. 2, 2016), available at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/01/02/state-police-educate-public-drones/R0J9aqVIYPwSBqnuEtrK1K/story.html>

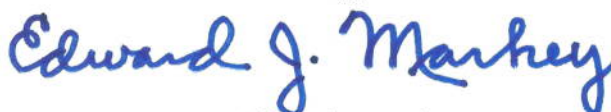
provide state and local officials, including law enforcement, with the guidance needed to effectively respond to drones and enforce the law.

As a member of the Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security, I respectfully request that you answer the following questions:

1. How many drone sightings within five miles of any Massachusetts airport have been reported to the FAA so far in 2016? Please provide a list of all sightings, including location and date. How did the FAA respond to each of these drone sightings?
 - a. How many drone sightings within five miles of any Massachusetts airport were reported to the FAA in 2015? Please provide a list of all sightings, including location and date. How did the FAA respond to each of these drone sightings?
 - b. How many drone sightings within five miles of any Massachusetts airport were reported to the FAA in 2014? Please provide a list of all sightings, including location and date. How did the FAA respond to each of these drone sightings?
2. How does the FAA educate drone operators about where they can and cannot fly?
3. How does the FAA encourage drone manufacturers to promote awareness of where hobbyists can fly their drones? Does the FAA require hobbyist drone manufacturers and sellers to post safety guidelines (e.g., at the point of sale, on their websites, etc.)? If no, why not?
4. How does the FAA collaborate with state and local law enforcement to respond to drone sightings near airports? Please describe the specific steps the FAA takes to work with Massachusetts law enforcement and transportation authorities.
5. Has the FAA issued any warnings or assessed any civil penalties for drone operators endangering public or aviation safety in Massachusetts? If yes, please list each warning date and penalty.
6. Is the FAA exploring technological solutions to prevent drone collisions and improve safety in sensitive airspace? If so, please detail what technologies are being explored, how these technologies could improve aviation safety, and when these technologies may become available.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I ask that you provide a written response to my inquiry by February 29, 2016.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey