

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 10, 2018

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

In 2016, Congress required the Department of Transportation (DOT) to conduct a review of U.S. airline family seating policies and, if appropriate, direct airlines to establish policies ensuring children can sit adjacent to at least one adult family member. We write to inquire why, more than two years after being directed by Congress to address this issue, DOT has failed to take action to ensure that families can fly together.

Families that travel with children on airplanes have few options to ensure that they will be seated together. Parents who want certainty that they will be seated with their children may be required to pay extra fees for advance seat assignments or purchase more expensive tickets. Otherwise, parents are forced to rely on the kindness of strangers willing to trade seats so that their children are not sitting by themselves.

The obligation Congress placed on you to address this issue is clear. On July 15, 2016, the President signed into law a reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration that passed Congress with bipartisan support. Section 2309 of that bill imposed an unambiguous requirement on DOT: “Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Transportation shall review and, if appropriate, establish a policy directing all air carriers providing scheduled passenger interstate or intrastate air transportation to establish policies that enable a child, who is age 13 or under on the date an applicable flight is scheduled to occur, to be seated in a seat adjacent to the seat of an accompanying family member over the age of 13, to the maximum extent practicable and at no additional cost.”¹

In February 2018, DOT explained that it had “conducted a review of U.S. airlines’ policies related to family seating and is considering this information to determine whether there are actions that may be appropriate to enable children and adult family members to obtain seats together on aircraft.”² But the only action taken by the DOT in response to this congressional mandate has been to include on its website tips for families seeking to sit together and links to existing family seating information on some airline websites. This is inadequate.

¹ FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-190, § 2309, 130 Stat. 615, 648-49.


² Robert Silk, *DOT studies pricing models that split up families flying together*, Travel Weekly (Feb. 26, 2018), <https://www.travelweekly.com/Travel-News/Airline-News/DOT-studies-pricing-models-that-split-up-families-flying-together>.


DOT owes Congress and the American people an explanation why it has failed to help families traveling with young children fly together. We therefore respectfully request that, by October 1, 2018, you answer the following questions:


1. Please describe the review of U.S. airline policies related to family seating that DOT has conducted, and provide a copy of any reports, memoranda, or other documents memorializing it.
2. Has DOT publicly disclosed its review of family seating policies? If no, why not?
3. Why has DOT not directed airlines to establish policies ensuring children can sit next to or adjacent to at least one adult family member?
4. Will the inclusion on DOT's website of tips for families seeking to sit together and links to some airlines' family seating information ensure that families with young children can sit together during a flight?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Daniel Greene on Senator Markey's staff at 202-224-2742.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator


Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator


Brian Schatz
United States Senator


Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



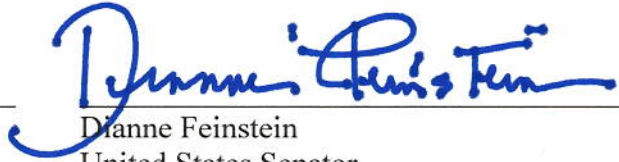
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