

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

Washington, DC 20515-1314  
December 2, 2014

The Honorable Bill Shuster  
Chairman, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
2165 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**RE: Request for Hearing With Regard to FAA Safety Concerns Involving Air Traffic Controller Hiring Practices**

Dear Chairman Shuster:

I respectfully request that you convene a hearing to inquire about the recent decision by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to suddenly alter its process for hiring air traffic controllers and its implications for the safety of the traveling public. The FAA recently abandoned its longstanding custom of giving preferential consideration to experienced and specially trained candidates and veterans for a different approach.

The Air Traffic- Collegiate Training Initiative (AT-CTI) was established by the FAA to broaden employment opportunities in air traffic controller positions and has been a longstanding, trusted hiring source for the agency. Students graduating from these programs maintain specialized aviation degrees created by the FAA itself and, until recently, received preferential status in the application process contingent on school recommendations. The agency currently holds AT-CTI agreements with 36 schools across the country. These schools offer comprehensive curricula that the FAA describes as "contain[ing] much more aviation related material than we require." AT-CTI graduates applying for the position of air traffic controller are able to bypass the first five weeks of training at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City.

In February, the FAA opened a one-time vacancy announcement that combined all applicants: those with specialized aviation degrees, military veterans with air traffic control experience, and the general public. The Agency failed to adequately inform applicants and various longstanding pooling sources about a plan for a revamped interim hiring process. This non-transparent process incorporates a Biographical Questionnaire (BQ), a test that does not require applicants to show IDs on-site, or sit in a secured testing site. Furthermore, it manages to disqualify qualified candidates with specialized degrees and military air traffic control experience because of arbitrary multiple choice test questions and responses the FAA deemed 'wrong.' Applicants were unable to advance in the hiring process following disqualification from the BQ.

Numerous applicants who have 'failed' the BQ without receiving their score, without being informed what score was needed to pass and the metrics used for scoring the BQ, are unable to reapply for future air traffic controller positions with the FAA due to their reaching the maximum age requirement of 31 years before the next hiring cycle. Applicants are left in the dark as to how to prepare themselves to reapply for future openings and remain unaware of what criteria and scores they need to pass.

Several graduates, after spending thousands of dollars and acquiring specific knowledge for the job, have failed the BQ and were unable to advance in the February hiring round. AT-CTI programs have now experienced drastic drops in enrollment this fall, as applicants no longer see the benefit of obtaining a specialized aviation degree in light of the new hiring process. To date, four of the thirty-six CTI programs will terminate by Fall 2015.

The FAA recently addressed Aviation Subcommittee Chairman LoBiondo's inquiries regarding the safety implications resulting in the sudden change in air traffic control hiring practices. In his response, however, FAA Administrator Michael Huerta raises new concerns as he fails to provide information and answer critical questions posed by the chairman, including a release of the BQ scoring mechanisms, the percentage threshold needed to pass the BQ, plans for revising the hiring process moving forward, and how the process purports to enhance aviation safety.

I request that the FAA describe the manner in which it developed and validated the Questionnaire it used as outlined in their response. An October 2014 report released by the FAA found that the use of biodata did not adequately contribute to the prediction of air traffic controller success. The report states, "If biodata are to be used to select controllers, additional research is required to identify those biodata items that will add to the prediction of controller training performance over and above the effect of AT-SAT score and age." This finding, in my view, is an admission that the current Biographical Assessment is inadequate and fails to achieve its intended purpose.

The agency's lack of transparency continues to erode my confidence that it places the safety of our skies as a top priority. Incidents such as the recent fire at the Chicago En Route Center in Aurora, Illinois, only serve to highlight the problems plaguing air traffic control in general at the FAA. The American people need assurance that conditions and processes in place at the FAA remain safe and security-focused.

These circumstances prompted me to introduce the SAFE TOWERS Act. This legislation ensures that only the most highly qualified air traffic controller candidates are selected to work in our facilities and towers, making certain both our facilities and skies are protected and secure at all times.

The FAA's procrastination makes my legislation necessary in order to restore the confidence of the American people in the agency. Still, I believe the FAA should appear before your committee to provide a thorough explanation of its changes to its hiring practices and clarify how these changes enhance the safety of the flying public. I greatly appreciate your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



Randy Hultgren  
Member of Congress, IL-14