

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1314

June 11, 2014

The Honorable Secretary Anthony Foxx
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Federal Aviation Administration Hiring Practices

Dear Secretary Foxx:

In December 2013, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) released their "10-Year Strategy for the Air Traffic Control Workforce." This plan outlined an effort to replace more than 10,000 Air Traffic Controllers over the next decade. This announcement was intended to create opportunity to become part of the next generation of Air Traffic Controllers. There are strong signs that the plan has achieved just the opposite of its original intent and has resulted in unjust economic injury to qualified candidates. Preserving safety amongst travelers and within the aviation community should always remain a priority.

As you are aware, to meet requirements of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Management Directive 715, the Office of the Assistant Administrator for Civil Rights performed a Barrier Analysis. Accordingly, the FAA was directed to adopt a new hiring system, ensuring a workplace "free of barriers that impede full opportunities." Under the new hiring process, applicants must now pass two tests: 1. a Biographical Assessment and 2. an air traffic selection and training (AT-SAT) test. The AT-SAT is available only to candidates earning passing scores from the Assessment and meeting minimal requirements. Once a candidate meets basic qualifications and passes the two pre-employment tests, they are assigned to three groups contingent on scores, military veteran status, and relevant degrees.

The newly revised hiring process is saturated with a disturbing lack of transparency in regards to how Air Traffic Controllers are selected. Applicants are not required to possess previous air traffic control experience, specialized technical degrees, aviation experience, or additional capabilities. Candidates need only demonstrate three years of work experience, a Bachelor's degree, or three years combined education and work experience along with passage of the FAA pre-employment tests. Preference is no longer given to candidates receiving, or currently enrolled in, specialized degree programs.

Previous hiring by the FAA did not include a prerequisite test to the AT-SAT in the form of the Biographical Assessment. Thousands of applicants passed at a qualifying 70 percent, prompting the FAA to create a "highly qualified" threshold of 85 percent or above. Over the last three years, an increasing disparity in race and national origin for those scoring above the threshold emerged. For this reason, amongst others, the Barrier Analysis recommended the FAA consider race, national origin, and gender diversity as high priorities in configuring the new hiring process. While it is agreed that any hiring process should offer equal opportunity and be without discrimination, that consideration must be counterbalanced by the need for specialized education and training, ensuring the absolute safety of our citizens.

Although the new hiring process seeks to eliminate existing barriers, it is our understanding that new barriers to qualified applicants have been put in place. In order to sit for the AT-SAT skills test, candidates who have invested personal resources into years of specialized training must now pass the enigmatic Biographical Assessment. If you fail the “assessment,” you are prohibited from taking the aptitude exam. There are numerous examples of applicants that have previously passed the AT-SAT with perfect scores and have not passed this new assessment. Candidates receive pass or fail marks, without numerical value or any explanation. What the assessment embodies and how it is scored remains a mystery. Of the estimated 28,500 applicants who began under the new hiring process, only 2,103 advanced to the AT-SAT. Several applicants claim they were not informed of this new hurdle in the hiring process. It appears that applicants with the highest level of education and training are now being “tested” for undetermined factors and rolling the dice on a huge upfront investment that might leave them having outstanding qualifications and expertise, but no job.

Additionally, applicants have expressed further frustrations over the prolonged waiting period for receiving their AT-SAT results. It is our understanding that applicants who have passed the Biographical Assessment have “aged out” after turning 31, while stuck in the bureaucratic queue waiting on their AT-SAT test scores.

The above findings raise disturbing questions as to why certain new hiring practices have been applied without easily understood, logical explanations.

We ask the FAA to provide answers to the following concerns:

1. Please provide a complete sample of the Biographical Assessment, as well as accompanying scoring procedures and criteria for scoring a “pass” or “fail.”
2. Please provide your plan for providing relief for those applicants who had “aged out” during the scoring of their AT-SAT. Under the old system, test scores were immediately available electronically. In this age of technology, it is disconcerting that an applicant should wait up to 6 weeks to be informed of their AT-SAT results.
3. Please detail all communications that took place between the FAA and educational institutions leading up to the change to the new hiring process. Include a detailed list of educational institutions and the specific dates in which FAA contacted them. Please also detail how FAA conveyed the hiring process change to all students who were already in the pipeline for advanced degrees to become Air Traffic Controllers.
4. Finally, please provide metrics on how the new hiring process has enhanced aviation safety overall. Also, provide metrics on how the new process has changed the demographics of applicants who will successfully enter the marketplace as Air Traffic Controllers, including race, national origin, and gender diversity.

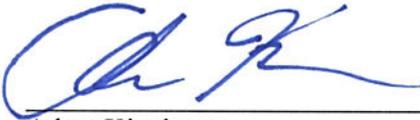
Sincerely,



Randy Hultgren
Member of Congress



Tammy Duckworth
Member of Congress



Adam Kinzinger
Member of Congress



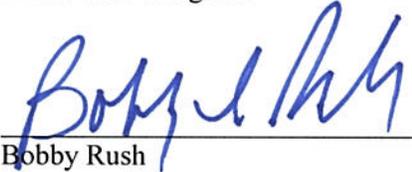
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