

August 27, 2020

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio,

The undersigned veterans and disability organizations write to express our support for the disability-related provisions included in the Healthy Flights Act of 2020 (H.R. 7867). These provisions send a strong message that providing accommodations and assistance to air travel passengers with disabilities, including veterans with disabilities, is important to ensuring that civil rights are respected during public health emergencies.

In response to the coronavirus, domestic air carriers have instituted policies requiring passengers age two and older to wear face masks or coverings as a condition of travel. The majority of these policies, however, fail to provide any accommodations for passengers with disabilities who may be unable to wear a covering due to a disability. Instead of simply denying boarding to these passengers, the Healthy Flights Act of 2020 would require carriers to perform individualized assessments to determine the risk of allowing them to fly without using a face mask or covering in the required manner. The legislation would also require air carrier personnel and their contractors to assist passengers as needed with donning or removing face masks or coverings and disinfecting or sanitizing aisle chairs, push wheelchairs, and personnel mobility devices surrendered to carriers.

The protections outlined in this legislation are critical to ensuring the ability of passengers with disabilities to travel by air during the pandemic. Without accommodations, these passengers may be forced to miss important life events, needed medical treatments, and essential work trips. If time permits, they may be instead forced to drive long distances; thus, further exposing individuals with disabilities who may also be at high-risk to the virus as they travel.

We look forward to working with you to ensure passage of the important protections outlined in this legislation. As the bill moves forward, we also ask that you mandate clear masks, to the extent available, for all customer-related positions to ensure communication access for passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing. If you have any questions, please contact Heather Ansley, Associate Executive Director of Government Relations, Paralyzed Veterans of America, by email at heathera@pva.org.

Sincerely,

American Association of People with Disabilities
American Council of the Blind
ALS Association

The Arc of the United States
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Blinded Veterans Association
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)
Epilepsy Foundation
National Association of the Deaf
The National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Rights Network
Paralyzed Veterans of America
United Spinal Association