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DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND POLICY COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States House of Representatives

September 8, 2022

The Honorable Billy Nolen
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Nolen:

I write on behalf of my constituents who are having their lives disrupted by pervasive noise that is reportedly coming from helicopters flying close to homes at various hours of the day and night. Residents of New Jersey's Ninth Congressional district have informed my office that these flights have also increased in frequency. I appreciate that several factors are related to the source of helicopter noise, but I hope there are actions we can consider to address my constituents' growing aggravation and I write to better understand the issues related to helicopter flights and noise.

Aircraft noise has an impact on North Jerseyans' quality of life. There have been complaints to my office and local media reports about helicopter activity that has disturbed sleeping patterns and caused homes to shake. Studies detailing the negative impacts of aircraft noise, including from helicopters,¹ have found it causes disturbances that can increase community annoyance, disrupt sleep, adversely affect academic performance of children, and even increase the risk for cardiovascular disease.

I understand there are several flight operators in the tristate and North Jersey region, including private businesses involved in transit or tours, as well as public operations that involve military, law enforcement, or air medical evacuation missions. The public safety records of these operators are checked. A helicopter operated by a private company crashed soon after takeoff at Essex County Airport, causing serious injuries to the pilot.² Initial reports from the National Transportation Safety Board indicated that the aircraft may have had faulty repairs before takeoff.

Presently, federal response to noise needs improvement. A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) study exposed gaps in the FAA Noise Portal for how individuals can report a complaint.³ While the study focuses on helicopters in the Washington, D.C. area, the

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5437751/>

² <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/essex/2022/06/04/helicopter-crash-essex-county-nj-airport/7513845001/>

³ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-200.pdf>

reporting issues appear similar for my constituents in North Jersey. The GAO study highlights that limited sharing of information between the FAA, operators and residents make it difficult for each to fully understand and respond to helicopter noise concerns. As the study recommends, I hope a mechanism to identify, track, and respond to individual noise concerns is being developed for my constituents and other Americans to address this information sharing deficiency. Please describe if the FAA has directed its Office of Environment and Energy to develop such a mechanism to exchange helicopter noise information, and if not, why not.

Additionally, I ask you to respond to the following questions to better understand how the FAA efficiently and effectively addresses aircraft noise complaints:

- Please describe any lessons learned since the FAA published its “Policy on Addressing Aircraft Noise Complaints and Inquiries from the Public” that was last updated on December 4, 2019.⁴ Has the FAA considered making improvements or changes to its policy?
- How does the FAA monitor or assess if helicopter flights are following the “Fly Neighborly” procedures and guidance to identify noise mitigation process? Specifically, how does the FAA manage and direct helicopter operations to:
 - Minimize rotor and engine operation while on the ground;
 - Descend and ascend steeply near landing areas;
 - Relocating helipads and landing areas away from residential areas;
 - Fly at the highest practical altitude;
 - Avoid flying low over populated areas;
 - Fly over major roads, rail lines, or waterways;
 - Vary routes for regular flights;
 - Avoid noise sensitive areas, such as hospitals or schools;
 - Avoid rapid and high angled turns;
 - Avoid extensive hovering and develop route structures;
 - Require investments in quieter technology or newer helicopter models; and
 - Fly normal cruising speeds or slower over noise sensitive areas
- Please describe the FAA policy for helicopters minimum and maximum altitudes, and flight routes and procedures in North Jersey.
- For the past 10 years, please outline the following:
 - The total number of helicopter operators and unique registration numbers for aviation activity, including an assessment of how many times each operator has been cited for a noise or safety violation;
 - Estimates on the total number of flights per year, including time of day, a description of the location of flights and destination, the flight mission.

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https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/policy_guidance/envir_policy/media/FAA_NoiseComplaintPolicy_191204_FNL.pdf

- Please describe if the FAA has studied helicopter noise issues in North Jersey. If so, are there specific recommendations that have been or have not been implemented?
- Will the FAA Aviation Noise Ombudsman hold any public meetings in my district to hear directly from my constituents about their noise complaints?

Please send answers to my questions by September 23, 2022. Thank you very much for the time and prompt attention to my request. I look forward to working together to address the noise concerns of my constituents in North Jersey because no community should have their lives disrupted by this kind of irregular, disruptive noise.

Sincerely,



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress