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The Voice of Aviation Business

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Subcommittee on Aviation

"FAA Reauthorization: Securing the Future of General Aviation"
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Committee Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen, Subcommittee Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Cohen, and distinguished Members of the Aviation Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Air Transportation Association (NATA) and its nearly 3,700 aviation business members. For more than 80 years, NATA has been the voice of aviation business. Our advocacy began in 1940, when the threat of war put general aviation in the United States at risk. As the U.S. Army sought to ban all flights by privately owned aircraft, 83 charter members representing all types of general aviation businesses united as a singular voice to successfully ask Congress and the Administration to keep the airspace open to this important industry.

Today, NATA continues to advocate for a broad cross-section of the general and business aviation industry, including fixed base operators (FBOs), part 135 on-demand air carriers, part 145 maintenance repair stations (MROs), aviation fuel producers and suppliers, flight schools, air medical operators, and airport sponsors at general aviation airports. I will briefly explain the function and impact of each of these general aviation industry segments.

Fixed Base Operators

Fixed base operators (FBOs), as the primary service and fuel providers to general aviation aircraft operators, provide mission-critical support and infrastructure to general aviation as well as to many essential public services including law enforcement, EMS, fire management, military, and National Guard units. FBOs often provide private general aviation passenger and customer service terminals; line service, such as aircraft parking, fueling, tie-down, and hangar space; technical services, such as airframe and engine maintenance; aircraft rentals, charters, management and/or sales; flight instruction; aircraft catering; ground transportation and parking; and amenities for pilots, passengers, and crew. In addition, FBOs at many commercial airports perform line maintenance, cabin cleaning, and baggage handling for part 121 commercial, passenger, and cargo airline customers. NATA's FBO members range in size from single-location small businesses to regional, national, and international chains. In total, the domestic FBO industry includes nearly 3,000 business locations operating under lease with airport authorities around the country.

Part 135 On-Demand Air Charter

One of the most critical contributions of general aviation is providing on-demand transportation for freight and passengers, especially to communities that have no scheduled commercial air carrier service. Most operators using general aviation aircraft in a for-hire passenger and/or cargo capacity are certificated to operate under Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 135 and conduct numerous types of missions, including governmental, business, and recreational travel, as well as medical flights and disaster relief. NATA's air charter members regularly transport organ transplant surgical teams; private charter often offers the only transportation solution in such cases because of the short window of time to move organs from donor to recipient. The majority of NATA's air charter members are small businesses operating a range of aircraft from large turbo-powered business jets to small, single-engine piston-powered airplanes

and helicopters. In total, nearly 2,000 FAA-certified charter operators operate in all 50 states and U.S. Territories.

Part 145 Maintenance/Repair Stations

The term "repair station" refers to a maintenance facility that has been issued an FAA certificate under 14 CFR Part 145 and engages in the maintenance, preventive maintenance, inspection, and alteration of aircraft and aircraft products. Another more general term used throughout the industry is MRO, referring to repair stations as maintenance, repair, and overhaul facilities. FAA certified repair stations receive class ratings under the categories of airframe, powerplant, propeller, radio, instrument, and accessory. At last count, there were approximately 5,000 FAA-certified repair stations located domestically and abroad.

General Aviation Fuel Suppliers

NATA represents all of the nation’s major general aviation fuel suppliers who provide aviation businesses with Jet A, Avgas, refueler trucks, financing for fuel infrastructure, contract fuel, sustainability programs, and other logistical services. NATA’s fuel members include domestic producers of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and alternative unleaded fuel.

Flight Training

In the U.S., flight training is provided under three different sets of regulations: 14 CFR Part 61, 141, and 142. Part 61 training is often provided by individual, for-hire flight instructors, as well as some flight schools and FBOs. The curriculum is flexible and can be tailored to a student’s specific needs, such as the amount of time he or she can devote to training. In contrast, Part 141/142 certification mandates the use of a detailed, FAA-approved course outline, with students meeting specific performance standards. Across the country, accredited colleges and universities integrate flight training curriculums under 14 CFR 141 into the academic requirements for a degree in aviation science, catering to the full-time flight student who desires a structured training regimen. Together, these flight programs are educating and training the next generation of aircraft operators for both general and commercial aviation.

Aeromedical Services

Approximately 250 organizations in the U.S. are currently engaged in the transport of seriously ill or injured people to hospitals for emergency care. Air medical transport saves lives by bringing more medical capabilities to the patient than are normally provided by ground emergency medical services, along with faster transit times to the appropriate specialty care location—services not typically provided by commercial air carriers. These operators also support door-to-door service for organ transplant teams utilizing both helicopters and fixed wing aircraft.

General Aviation Airports

One of NATA's fastest-growing membership categories is that of general aviation airports. Our nation's 4,500 general aviation airports are vital economic engines, serving as arrival and departure points for economic developers; supporting agricultural, law enforcement, and fire-fighting missions; and providing access to critical medical care, especially in remote communities. By contrast, scheduled air carriers fly only to those places where the economics of operation justify service, approximately 500 airports nationally. The FAA defines general aviation airports as public-use airports that do not have scheduled service or have less than 2,500 annual passenger boardings. General aviation airports vary greatly in scope and complexity of operations, from single-runway airstrips with little infrastructure to larger airports supporting more operations than some primary commercial airports. Regardless of size, however, they all provide a vital lifeline to communities across the country, driving local economies and supporting essential services.

General Aviation Industry

Together, NATA's diverse member businesses form a critical portion of the general aviation industry, which supports 1.2 million jobs; provides over $247 billion in economic output in the United States alone; and contributes to the nation's competitiveness, growth, and continued innovation. The title of today's hearing, "Securing the Future of General Aviation," is particularly apt for the current state of our vital industry, as record-high activity levels coupled with rapid innovation in aircraft design, safety systems, and alternative fuel sources signal an ever evolving, ever growing, and ever relevant general aviation sector.

Of critical importance to the future of general aviation is FAA Reauthorization legislation that will maintain the security and increase the resiliency of our National Airspace System while refining the focus and improving the efficiency of its regulatory agency. I deeply appreciate the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's commitment to a timely, comprehensive, and bipartisan reauthorization process, and offer sincere thanks to Committee Chairman Sam Graves for his decision to include the first-ever general aviation title in the 2023 bill. To support that effort, I am pleased to offer testimony that reflects the direct input of NATA's membership and the recommendations of our member-driven policy committees, which convene thought-provoking industry leaders, examine contemporary issues, and pursue solutions to prioritize the safety and economic viability of our industry.

The task before this Subcommittee—to craft legislation updating and modernizing the Federal Aviation Administration—comes at a critical juncture for both the Agency and the industry it regulates. U.S. aviation continues to set the gold standard for safety and efficiency, but evidence of FAA inefficiency and inconsistency is growing even as the aviation industry experiences unprecedented growth and innovation, with the next generation of aircraft and fuels around the corner.

FAA Certification and Oversight

I want to begin by expressing NATA's appreciation of the existing FAA workforce. Tasked with maintaining the gold standard of aviation safety for the world's most complex airspace system, the Agency presides over almost every facet of the general aviation industry. NATA finds FAA leaders at all levels within the organization to be competent, committed, and collaborative, yet the Agency's understaffed workforce is shackled by antiquated methods and lack of permanent leadership in key positions. The resulting backlogs of critical FAA certification, rulemaking, and oversight functions is evidence that the Agency struggles to meet current industry needs, much less prepare for the growth emerging technologies will bring in the coming years.

I expect all of the members of today's distinguished panel will testify to ways that their respective memberships have been impacted by FAA's inefficient processing of its basic functions for the general aviation industry; I will focus on its effect on NATA's part 135 on-demand charter members.

Part 135 Certification Process

Prospective entrants to the on-demand air charter industry must complete a five-phase certification process, beginning with a pre-application stage that utilizes the Certification Service Oversight Process (CSOP) to determine FAA resources for initial certification and continued oversight of the prospective operator. Applications are either assigned to a certification team or placed on a waiting list.

Currently, that CSOP queue contains approximately 680 new certificate applications—a number that has tripled over just the past twelve months. Even without this current backlog, completion of the four remaining phases can take an applicant up to two years, deterring new industry entrants and increasing the risk of dangerous, illegal charter activity.

This process, based on an outdated, inefficient principles lacking in transparency, results in an unnecessarily costly and lengthy experience for applicants seeking legal entrance to the regulated on-demand charter industry. Inconsistencies among Flight Standard District Offices (FSDOs) and the current allocation procedures for the regional FAA workforce further exacerbate the problem. We are concerned that with the rapid pace of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) development, the demands for 135 certification and oversight will only continue to grow. To ensure U.S. global leadership in this emerging sector while maintaining the economic viability of the air charter sector, FAA must modernize its processes.

To facilitate, NATA asks Congress to mandate a collaborative FAA/industry working group to study methods for modernizing the part 135 certification process and to recommend long-term solutions for effective management of FAA resources. This working group should consider technological advancements to enhance efficiency, certification process benchmarks and timelines for both FAA and applicants, centralized management of FAA inspectors, and use of designee authority.

In the meantime, the FAA should provide immediate transparency to Congress and industry on the current certification backlog, allocation of FAA resources, and expected time to process all pending applicants. NATA believes an online certification dashboard would provide this increased transparency and could be easily implemented. In addition to making public the total number of applicants in the CSOP queue, de-identified data for each applicant should include certification category, start and completion date for each certification stage, and FAA resources assigned.

Part 135 Check Pilot Functions

Once certified, regulations require all part 135 on-demand carriers to have sufficient qualified instructors and check pilots approved by the FAA to meet the training and checking needs of the carrier's pilots.[1] For operators with sufficient staff to perform checks themselves in accordance with existing regulatory requirements, the FAA has issued guidance to inspectors and operators to encourage the approval of more carrier check pilots. Only when the carrier lacks adequate resources should the FAA be required to provide these checks. Despite this, significant gaps persist in ensuring timely checks for air charter pilots, in particular completion of the pilot line check required by § 135.299.

One challenge is that the FAA imposes higher qualification requirements for a carrier's check pilots than it does for FAA inspectors conducting the same checks.[2] If the FAA standards, which presumably provide an acceptable level of safety, were applied to industry check pilots, many more carriers could provide their own line checks as the regulations intend. This would free up FAA workforce to attend to other duties and to assist smaller operators. Yet there also seems to be a persistent reluctance of local inspectors to approve qualified carrier personnel as check pilots—even when those carrier pilots meet the more stringent standards for industry check pilots.

In 2020, NATA petitioned the FAA to revise applicable regulations to align qualifications for carrier check pilots more closely with the qualifications required for FAA personnel providing checks.[3] The FAA has not acted upon that petition.

Dependency on the FAA for pilot checking tasks causes undue delays for operators waiting for an available inspector, diverts Agency resources away from other safety oversight tasks, and increases FAA costs as inspectors travel to the carrier to perform the check. The smallest of carriers, who by size are necessarily dependent upon FAA for checks, are subject to further unreasonable delays while the FAA workforce provides checks for larger carriers that are otherwise able and willing to supply their own check pilots.

NATA believes a Congressional directive could alleviate this problem by requiring FAA to engage with stakeholders, evaluate why check pilot approval continues to lag, and determine

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[1] *See* 14 CFR § 135.323 (a)(4)

[2] Carrier check pilots are individually authorized by local FAA inspectors and meet requirements of §§ 135.337 & 135.339. FAA Order 8900.1, Volume 1, Chapter 3, Section 6, Figure 1-2, Item 12, Operations Inspector Qualifications and Currency Requirements Matrix, provides FAA inspector qualifications.

[3] *See* https://www.regulations.gov/document/FAA-2020-0556-0001

further actions to increase the number of carrier check pilots. This engagement could be a separate working group, an additional tasking for an existing rulemaking committee, or another appropriate assembly assigned to report recommendations back to the Agency.

The FAA should specifically review why it has different qualification standards for FAA inspectors than for carrier check pilots. In addition, it should consider information in the NATA petition for rulemaking as well as the recommendations provided by prior rulemaking committees such as the Part 135/125 Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC), the Flight Crew Member Training Hours Requirement Review ARC, and the Air Carrier Training ARC.

Part 135 Aircraft Conformity

In addition to backlogs related to certification and check pilot functions, NATA members also report difficulties and delays in adding new aircraft to existing certificates due to varied workloads at local FSDOs and inconsistent interpretations of FAA regulations and directives by Principal Inspectors. This problem will only become more acute when the current CSOP backlog of approximately 680 pending new carrier certifications breaks and the expected flood of new entrants from emerging technologies, such as electric vertical take-off and landing vehicles (eVTOL) and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), become operational. The FAA must adjust its policy to provide timely oversight on an ever-expanding and increasingly complex industry.

First, FAA regulations do not require aircraft configuration evaluation to be carried out by the Agency. These functions can—and should—be carried out in partnership between certified entities and local FSDOs in a manner that is efficient, timely, and consistent throughout the country. Policies can be adopted to enable carriers or third-party evaluators to certify the conformity of an aircraft being added to a certificate—a process that will relieve the Agency of quality assurance checks and refocus the FAA workforce on its legally mandated oversight duties.

In addition, aircraft often move from one part 135 carrier to another at the aircraft owner's discretion. Even if the aircraft has continuously been on a part 135 carrier's certificate and subject to Agency oversight, this process currently requires a full conformity review, resulting in unnecessary delays prior to the aircraft being used in service by the new carrier. An NATA member recently spent ten months attempting to add a new aircraft to its certificate – ten months that the aircraft was grounded for no reason other than regulatory red tape. Establishing policy honoring the previously accepted aircraft configuration evaluation would eliminate needlessly repetitive functions and, once again, free inspectors to perform necessary safety oversight. Best of all, NATA believe this policy change would not necessitate rulemaking.

General Aviation Airports

NATA's member businesses operate at nearly 4,500 airports that support vital economic activity and connectivity in thousands of communities, many of which are not served by commercial aviation. In addition, our association represents nearly 300 general aviation airports, including more than 100 airport-sponsored FBOs. Although these general aviation airports vary in their complexity and frequency of flight operations, together with associated aviation businesses they

support law enforcement and emergency services; non-emergency medical and organ transport; executive, recreational, and cargo transport; vocational and aeronautical schools; powerline and pipeline patrol; and agricultural and conservation efforts.

In addition, general aviation airports will be the first to implement Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) operations in both urban and rural areas, making it even more critical that Reauthorization legislation prioritizes the ongoing maintenance and urgent modernization of GA airport infrastructure. Our nation's general aviation airports require both federal investment and increased public/private partnership opportunities to meet current demands, create more high-skilled and high-paying jobs, and advance innovative aviation technology.

Airport Improvement Program Funding

Currently, the general aviation airport annual entitlement under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) is $150,000—a figure that has remained stagnant for decades despite increased activity, rapid industry innovation, and inevitable inflation. Although the federal cost share of qualifying projects for non-primary entitlements is set at 90-95 percent and qualifying airports may stack AIP grands for four years, rising inflation and the soaring cost of construction make these funds insufficient for many urgent airport improvement projects. Furthermore, the non-primary entitlement fails to account for the diversity in size and needs of general aviation airport operations.

Much in our industry has changed since Congress set the $150,000 basic AIP entitlement more than twenty years ago. It is time for this Congress to take action to not only account for inflation but also for the changing needs of general aviation airports by adjusting the basic entitlement for all GA airports and by introducing a formula to further increase grants for larger GA airports based on flight activity. In addition, Congressional action to increase the federal cost share to 100 percent and extend entitlement grant expiration to four years would allow airports to amass more funding for eligible projects and assist the smallest GA airports that struggle to come up with matching funds.

PFAS at General Aviation Airports

Another challenge facing airports across the country is the presence of "forever chemicals." FAA regulations have long required part 139 certified airports to provide aircraft rescue and firefighting (ARFF) services utilizing aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) that contains per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) chemicals, even as the Environmental Protection Agency has taken steps to designate such substances as hazardous under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA). Historically, many non-part 139 general aviation airports have voluntarily adopted FAA policies regarding AFFF, looking toward the Agency's regulations as safety best practices.

Furthermore, until last year, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 409: *Standard on Aircraft Hangars*—the primary standard for hangar fire protection that is referenced by the international building code; the international fire code; and state and local statutes, ordinances, and regulations—required most modern general aviation hangars to maintain automatic foam fire

suppression systems, many of which utilized fire-fighting foams containing PFAS chemicals. The presence of these foam systems on airport property represents a risk to all stakeholders—airport sponsors and aviation businesses alike.

NATA's work in this area includes educating local authorities on alternative fire suppression methods and advocating for building requirements that accurately reflect the low risk of fuel fires in aircraft hangars, the propensity for costly accidental discharges of foam fire suppression systems, and the harmful environmental impact of such occurrences. Because of NATA's efforts, the latest edition of NFPA 409 incorporated some of the Association's proposed changes, providing aviation businesses with more tools to protect against fire without the use of foam systems.

But these efforts are not enough. NATA needs Congress to partner with airports and aviation businesses by requiring federal guidance on a transition away from fluorinated foams as well as protection from potential litigation.

Congress should provide exemption from PFAS-related litigation—including CERCLA liability—for all federally obligated airports that maintained AARF services, as well as for airport sponsors, owners of aircraft hangars, and landlords and lessees at public-use airports that were required to install and maintain foam fire suppression systems by authorities having jurisdiction.

In addition, Congress should direct FAA to provide guidance on PFAS removal, remediation, and disposal for airports and associated aviation businesses located on airport properties, as well as establish a short-term grant program available to both airport sponsors and private businesses located on airport properties to assist in PFAS removal, remediation, and disposal.

Aviation Industry Sustainability and Innovation

Alternative Fuels

NATA is an active supporter of efforts to accelerate production and adoption of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) as well as development of a commercially viable, fleet authorization, unleaded alternative to 100LL. NATA commends the Congressional creation of SAF-specific tax incentives in 2022 and believes such credits should serve as a model to similarly incentivize production of a fleet-authorized unleaded aviation fuel.

As a stakeholder in the Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions (EAGLE) initiative, NATA is committed to laying out a clear plan to transition piston-engine aircraft to lead-free aviation fuels by the end of 2030—or sooner if possible—without compromising the existing U.S. transportation infrastructure system, aviation safety, or the economic and broader public benefits of general aviation. NATA supports funding to accelerate required testing and regulatory approval for the implementation of an unleaded avgas, as well as investments in infrastructure to make alternative unleaded fuel more widely available while we await an unleaded fuel that meets the needs of the entire piston-aircraft fleet. The association opposes any efforts to ban 100LL

before a safe, fleet authorization alternative is widely available and strongly supports fuel production tax incentives once that alternative is approved.

NATA understands that we must take creative steps now to minimize the use of leaded fuel in affected communities. To facilitate the use of current unleaded fuels, which can service a portion of the piston-aircraft fleet, the Association has published a white paper educating fuel service providers on best practices for deploying multiple fuels at airports. In addition, NATA has updated its Safety 1st General Aviation Misfueling Prevention Program—a free, online training resource for pilots, line service professionals, and other aircraft refueling stakeholders—to address the risks associated with the introduction of an additional grade of fuel.

To increase the commercial availability of current alternative unleaded fuels, however, production must also increase. NATA strongly believes that short-term tax credits for refiners, blenders, and distributors of approved unleaded fuels would incentivize increased production and accelerated deployment to airports. The introduction of a second grade of fuel requires investments to expand existing fuel infrastructure. In addition to AIP funding, NATA believes the development of a short-term grant program available to both public and private entities could be used to support unleaded fuel infrastructure for airports and FBOs, incentivize flight school adoption of alternative fuels, and subsidize supplemental type certificate (STCs) or other end-user costs that could affect fuel adoption.

Lastly, Congress should also ensure a safe transition by requiring unleaded fuel alignment with engine and airframe original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards beyond any minimum standard determined by an STC. Such requirements best assure a universally acceptable standard for refinement and blending of products that can be consistently delivered to airports, FBOs, and aircraft operators.

Advanced Air Mobility

Also critical to the future of general aviation is Advanced Air Mobility (AAM), which holds enormous promise to reduce aircraft emissions and noise impacts, to speed up cargo and medical transport in rural areas, and to facilitate urban mobility without added congestion. However, we must swiftly prepare for its adoption in the existing aviation ecosystem if we hope to fully harness AAM's potential to reduce the aviation industry’s environmental impact and maintain U.S. global aviation leadership.

NATA applauds Congressional passage of the Advanced Aviation Infrastructure Modernization (AAIM) Act and the Advanced Air Mobility Coordination and Leadership Act, and we thank the members of this Subcommittee, including Subcommittee Chair Graves and Ranking Member Larsen, for their leadership on those critical pieces of legislation in the last Congress. Now we ask Congress to take further action to ensure FAA development of a sound regulatory framework for AAM operations, as well as guidance for and investment in the physical infrastructure necessary to support them.

We see a natural nexus between existing part 135 on-demand carrier operations, existing general aviation airports, existing FBO infrastructure, and emerging AAM innovation. First, NATA

believes both urban and rural general aviation airports offer logical spaces to introduce eVTOL aircraft and other AAM technologies. Second, NATA members from all sectors are preparing to support, maintain, fuel, and operate this next generation of aircraft, but many are seeking guidance on the necessary infrastructure and operational guidelines to do so safely and successfully.

In 2022, NATA formed its Advanced Air Mobility Committee to ensure a unified approach to modernization of both our infrastructure and operational framework. We believe communication, collaboration, and cooperation between government partners all aviation sectors stakeholders will be key to creating a healthy and vibrant AAM ecosystem. To that end, NATA hosted a town hall in January to foster connections between the AAM community, federal regulators, and leaders from NATA's other policy committees. The discussions on operations, ground infrastructure, safety, maintenance, security, and ground handling training will inform NATA's legislative and regulatory advocacy as we partner with Congress and the FAA to move this technology forward and help stakeholders prepare for its adoption.

Aviation Funding Stability

Risks of Government Shutdown

As an operational Agency with a critical safety mission, the FAA must be protected from risks associated with budget battles and potential government shutdowns. The longest government shutdown in U.S. history (2018-2019) drew national attention to the dire consequences such shutdowns pose to the safety and security of the NAS, the effectiveness of the FAA, and the economic growth of the aviation industry. For 35 days, essential government employees such as air traffic controllers and TSA agents were required to work without pay, while nearly 18,000 FAA employees involved in a range of activities—from certification and safety inspections to NextGen deployment—were furloughed.

Legislation introduced in both the 116th and 117th Congresses authorizing the FAA to draw from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund in the event of a government shutdown enjoyed broad aviation industry support. NATA asks this Congress to take final action on this issue in FAA Reauthorization legislation to ensure that FAA's critical operations continue without interruption in the event of a government shutdown. Allowing the FAA to draw from the Airport and Airways Trust Fund would avoid the furlough of essential workers and maintain the Agency's vital safety and operational functions.

Fuel Fraud Diversion

To further maintain the stability of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, NATA urges Congress to end the diversion of non-commercial jet fuel tax revenues. The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (PL 114-94) directed the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study the impacts of a 2005 highway bill provision that increased the tax rate on non-commercial jet fuel to 24.4 cpg. GAO's 2016 report[4] found that the change in tax law has the unintended effect of diverting these non-commercial jet fuel tax revenues from the Airport and

[4] *See* https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-16-746r

Airway Trust Fund to the Highway Trust Fund. Specifically, the GAO report concludes the diversion results in an annual loss to the Airport and Airway Trust Fund of between $100 million and $200 million—one to two billion dollars over a decade. The report also cast doubt on the rationale behind the 2005 change in tax law and the provision's utility going forward. NATA believes the GAO report serves as sufficient justification for repealing the 2005 provision or requiring a transfer of the appropriate tax funds to the Airport and Airway Trust Fund.

Aviation Industry Workforce

One of the greatest threats to our current and future general aviation industry is the workforce shortage that continues to plague NATA's member businesses at all organizational levels and across all industry segments. Of ongoing concern is the gap between the supply and demand for skilled aviation professionals such as aircraft pilots and A&P mechanics, which Congress recognized by the creation of the section 625 workforce grants in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization. Designed to bolster the pilot and mechanic workforce, these grants have enormous potential to affect change but are inadequately funded to meet even a fraction of the demand.

NATA thanks Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Ranking Member Larsen for his introduction of the Aviation WORKS Act to reauthorize the section 625 grants, extend them to other aviation sectors, and increase funding levels to $20 million annually. We ask this Subcommittee to include similar provisions in this year's Reauthorization; we also encourage Congress to allocate sufficient funding and resources for FAA to administer the grants more efficiently and effectively.

Congress should also consider the expansion of existing federal programs that can alleviate barriers to entry for aspiring pilots and aircraft mechanics, such as eligibility for federal student loans. Establishment of a National Center for the Advancement of Aviation will also help recruit the next generation of aviation workforce by raising awareness of aviation career opportunities and facilitating collaboration between all industry sectors. Legislation to create such a center passed the House of Representative by a wide, bipartisan majority in 2022; we encourage its inclusion in Reauthorization legislation.

Lastly, we ask the Subcommittee to carefully examine the recommendations made by the Women in Aviation Advisory Board and the Youth in Aviation Taskforce created by the 2018 FAA Reauthorization.

Collectively, these provisions will help our industry develop and recruit the diverse, resilient workforce needed to secure the future of our nation's general aviation industry.

NATA appreciates the dedication of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Aviation Subcommittee toward an on-time reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration, as well as your commitment to meaningful engagement with general aviation stakeholders throughout the process. We look forward to continued collaboration on these and other solutions to the challenges facing our industry and the FAA. Together, we will secure a sustainable, secure, safe, and successful future for the general aviation industry and the thousands of communities it serves.