

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2003

The Honorable Norman Mineta
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Dear Secretary Mineta:

We are writing once again with regard to the three Maryland airports that remain closed to transient general aviation traffic: College Park Airport (CGS), Potomac Airfield (VKX), and Hyde Field (W32). Each passing day brings another round of letters to our offices from our general aviation community and the small businesses that serve them.

Currently, the provisions of Special Federal Aviation Regulation 94 (SFAR 94) allow only locally based aircraft to operate to or from these airports. Although this regulation was a critical first step in reopening the three Maryland airports, the continued prohibition on transient operations undermines the viability of each and threatens their future existence.

It is our understanding that the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) filed a petition with the FAA to fully open these airports back in October 2002. Finally, after three months, we understand the FAA Office of Rulemaking has formally registered this petition. In addition to reopening these airports to transient traffic, the petition asks that vetted pilots be permitted to conduct air traffic pattern work at all three Maryland airports.

With the exception of New York City, no other region in the country was more directly impacted by the horrific events of September 11th than the Washington, DC region. We are intimately familiar, therefore, with the need for heightened security around our federal facilities, military installations, and other critical infrastructure. We support you and your department's efforts to safeguard our nation against future threats and recognize that safety and security in our skies must remain a top priority.

However, current operating restrictions have caused Maryland's airport operators, aircraft owners, and the businesses that are dependent on them significant economic hardship. If these restrictions are not dealt with soon, it is likely that these airports will not survive. This would be a tragedy for all three, especially College Park, the oldest continuing operating airport in the world.

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Therefore, we request that you thoroughly review SFAR 94 and give full and careful consideration to the modification for rulemaking as proposed by the AOPA petition. In addition, because the losses incurred by these three Maryland airports are due to a federally mandated airspace requirement, we continue to assert that it is incumbent on the Federal government to provide immediate relief equal to their financial losses to date, and/or to fully compensate them for their inability to operate their businesses in the future.

Thank you in advance for looking into this matter. We know that you understand the critical nature of this issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator



Paul S. Sarbanes
United States Senator

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cc: Admiral James M. Loy
Under Secretary for Transportation Security
U.S. Department of Transportation
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