Month, Day, 2017

The Honorable XXX

(###) [Senate/House] Office Building

Washington, D.C. [20510 (Senate)/20515 (House)]

Dear [Senator/Representative XX]:

As Congress considers the reauthorization of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) programs, I write to urge your support of the Contract Weather Observer (CWO) program. Currently, the Senate FAA bill, S. 1405 contains Section 1219, entitled Moratorium on Changes to the Contract Weather Observer Program. The provision maintains the CWO program and its important safety benefits until October 1, 2021.

The FAA created the CWO Program in 1996 to provide critical weather monitoring in real-time, as weather conditions can rapidly change, and to provide augmentation and support of the Automated Surface Observing Systems (ASOS) at towered airports. Due to technological limitations of the ASOS, CWOs provide certified observers to supplement and backup the ASOS, ensuring the safety, efficiency, and reliability of our nation’s air travel system. Professional weather observers detect and survey weather conditions outside at ground level, providing real-time weather observations for airports and pilots. CWOs provide detailed information concerning thunderstorms, lightning, hail, tornadoes, freezing drizzle and freezing rain, frozen precipitation, ice pellets, snowfall, surface visibility, cloud heights and sky cover, and other elements in which the ASOS is limited in its ability to report accurately. In addition, professional weather observers provide manual backup of critical weather sensors when the ASOS experiences a partial or complete outage.

In May 2015, the FAA convened a meeting with a limited number of stakeholders and unveiled plans to eliminate professional weather observers at 57 sites nationwide. The FAA’s proposed plan is to transfer weather observing duties to Air Traffic Controllers (controllers). This raises major concerns, because the primary task of controllers is to maintain safe separation between aircrafts. Thus, weather observing would be a tertiary function. Additionally, controllers cannot go outside to monitor actual surface weather conditions. In the absence of weather observers, controllers would provide “limited aviation weather observations” (LAWRS), which, by definition, omit a substantial number of critical weather elements that are regularly reported by CWOs*.* Consequently, a significant degradation of air service could occur should controllers undertake weather observing responsibilities.

Last year, the House and Senate negotiated FAA extension included a provision that prohibited the FAA Administrator from discontinuing the CWO Program at any airport until October 1, 2017. This year, the Senate provision, Section 1219, goes further and protects the program until 2021. The House bill does not currently contain a similar provision.

As this year’s efforts to reauthorize the FAA continue, we urge you to convey your support for this important program to Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao, Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure Chairman Bill Shuster, and Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation Chairman John Thune. Your support is vital, and we thank you for your consideration on this issue.

Please feel free to contact me at (email and phone) with any questions or further information on the status of this issue.

Sincerely,