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August 20, 2015

Administrator Michael Huerta
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Huerta:

I write with grave and growing concerns about the dangers of rogue drone users. Numerous recent news stories have detailed the growing capability of ordinary citizens to launch and pilot sophisticated, sizeable devices that have flown into prohibited airspace, threatened privacy and peace of mind, and posed a serious risk to air travel. I call on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to take aggressive action to protect everyone who relies on safe and secure skies.

So far this year, pilots have reported more than twice as many close calls with drones as they reported in 2014. This startling statistic comes amid stories of drones nearly colliding with airlines in major cities, coming close to crashing into air ambulance helicopters, and hovering over stadiums filled with people. These drones – also known as Unmanned Aircraft Systems (“UAS”) or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (“UAVs”) – represent a significant opportunity for commercial innovation as well as economic gain, but they must be used safely by commercial and recreational users. The FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 required the FAA to finalize rules by August 2014 governing the use of drones weighing fewer than 55 pounds, but your agency is more than a year behind in that effort. The 2012 legislation also required the FAA to provide for the “safe integration of civil unmanned aircraft systems into the national airspace” by September 30, 2015. The FAA now appears highly unlikely to meet this goal. These delays are troubling, and they portend the continuing, unimpeded proliferation of drones alongside passenger planes, helicopters, and other traditional users of airspace. I call on your agency to move immediately to (1) finalize the rule governing use of small drones and (2) complete all other outstanding, mandated efforts to ensure the safe integration of drones into the national airspace.

As you take administrative and regulatory steps to satisfy Congressional requirements, I also call on your agency to take strong and swift enforcement steps immediately against anyone endangering the skies. The FAA has authority to pursue civil and criminal penalties against those who endanger the safety of the national airspace, and it is clear that a growing number of dangerous drone operators fail to operate their devices with the necessary due care or knowledge of safe flying practices we must demand. It is incumbent on your agency to use your

enforcement powers to stop activity that could result in the horror and havoc of a downed passenger plane or similar tragedy.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation – the panel with jurisdiction over aviation issues – I am eager to ensure your agency has all the tools necessary to pursue these goals. I am proud to support the Consumer Drone Safety Act (S. 1608), which clarifies the FAA’s authority and ensures that no gaps exist in the oversight of drones used or manufactured for recreational purposes. It also requires these devices to be manufactured with stringent safeguards to mitigate the damage they can cause when they are misused or malfunction. I will work to advance this important measure when Congress reconvenes next month and during any debate on reauthorization of federal aviation programs. If there are other areas in need of clarification, or if your agency needs additional resources to address rogue drone use, please let me know so we can advance those as well.

I appreciate your response to this matter and efforts to address this issue.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate