Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2015

The Honorable Bill Shuster
U.S. House of Representatives
2268 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
U.S. House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster and Ranking Member DeFazio:

We write as members of the Quiet Skies Caucus, an organization in Congress dedicated to reducing the impact of aircraft noise on the communities we represent. Every day, millions of Americans are forced to contend with acute levels of noise from passing aircraft—noise that disrupts their homes and businesses, negatively affects their health, and reduces their overall quality of life. We believe the 2015 Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act offers a unique opportunity to address this serious issue and respectfully request that you consider the following recommendations as you prepare the legislation for introduction:

1. **Mandate a robust community engagement process, including pre-decisional public hearings, for any new flight paths or procedures or changes to existing flight paths and procedures** – Along with improved capacity and fuel savings, the impact of aviation noise on affected communities should be considered when FAA assesses the overall benefits of proposed flight path changes. Meaningful, two-way communication with our communities is vital to ensuring that the concerns of residents are heard and incorporated into the final design of new airspace.

2. **Require FAA to use supplemental metrics when considering the impact of aviation noise on affected communities and lower the acceptable DNL threshold from 65 to 55 DNL** – FAA's current metric for quantifying aviation noise exposure, Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL), reflects mean noise levels and does not adequately capture the complete effects of noise on affected residents. When considering flight path changes, FAA should take into account other variables, including the concentration of extended noise, the frequency of flights, air traffic from 10PM to 7AM and impacts of low-frequency noise. In addition, FAA should lower the current threshold from 65 to 55 DNL to reflect the fact that this standard, first established in the 1970's, is arbitrary and does not align with current health research and the lived experience of families in our congressional districts.

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3. **Clarify that airport operators are legally allowed to implement—and should strongly consider—mitigation options in communities experiencing aircraft noise levels of less than 65 DNL** – Though FAA is no longer legally barred from doing so, the agency has resisted funding the mitigation of homes and businesses experiencing aircraft noise levels below a 65 DNL threshold. For the reasons described above, this metric may not adequately capture the impact of noise on the lives of affected residents and FAA should strongly consider allowing airport operators to mitigate residences experiencing less than 65 DNL where other metrics dictate that such measures are warranted.

4. **Reform Section 213(c)(2) of the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012** –This provision provides a categorical exclusion from adequate environmental reviews for flight path changes implemented through the NextGen process. It was written in an overly broad way and should be revisited by your Committee. Environmental reviews were instituted by Congress to protect Americans from actions that could be detrimental to their lives, and we believe bypassing such reviews in order to expedite the process will be materially harmful and could set a dangerous precedent. More broadly, we hope that the Committee will encourage FAA and its industry partners to continue working to implement new systems in a manner that takes into account not just safety and efficiency, but noise as well.

5. **Mandate independent research on the health impacts of aviation noise** – Few federal studies have been conducted to measure the health outcomes and consequences of prolonged exposure to high levels of aviation noise. Better research will help to inform and improve FAA policies on this important issue.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. We look forward to working with you as you develop the 2015 FAA Reauthorization to ensure that this legislation addresses the harmful impacts of aircraft noise on our communities.

Sincerely,

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Steve Israel
Member of Congress

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress

Tammy Duckworth
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Ted Lieu
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Anna Eshoo
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Stephen Lynch
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Maxine Waters
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