

Buffalo, New York- March 30, 2011 – As the House prepares to bring its version of the FAA Reauthorization Bill to the floor later this week, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' strongly condemned an amendment introduced by Rep. Bill Shuster (R-PA). The amendment, which is in response to complaints from cargo and non-scheduled air carriers regarding the FAA's flight and duty time Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, seeks to cripple the FAA's efforts by imposing additional requirements on the rulemaking process that are intended to grind the long-overdue reforms to a halt. The bill could also drastically impact every safety initiative contained in PL 111-216, the Airline Safety and FAA Extension Act of 2010, the landmark aviation safety legislation that the family group helped push through Congress in response to the crash of Continental Express Flight 3407 operated by Colgan Air in February 2009.

"It is absolutely mind-boggling that the likes of ABX Air (part of Air Transport Services Group) and other supplemental carriers can spread thousands of dollars around during the election process to cultivate potential sponsors of special interest legislation like this," stated Susan Bourque of East Aurora, New York, who lost her sister and prominent 9/11 activist Beverly Eckert on Flight 3407. "Meanwhile we don't even have a political action committee - we've been to Washington nearly 40 times over the past two years on our own dime to fight for these new pilot fatigue guidelines and other safety reforms. All we want is to prevent potentially dangerous pilot scheduling practices, and to make regional airline travel safer for all. It is too late for any of these safety reforms to bring Beverly back, but it would be nice to see the House stand up for safety and do right by the millions of Americans who fly every year, as opposed to just looking out for the industry and its lobbyists."

Since President Obama signed PL 111-216 into law last August, the group has focused on ensuring that the provisions in it are not watered down by the airlines and other opponents during the rulemaking and implementation period.

"We've said all along that the legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by the President last August would only be as strong as the regulations that came forth from it," stated Kenneth Mellett of MacLean, Virginia, who lost his son, Coleman. "In October of 2009, H.R. 3371 passed the House with broad bipartisan support, 409-11, and among other things, directed the FAA to issue new flight and duty time limitations 'based on the best available scientific information'. Now that Administrator Babbitt has done that and has us as close to a final rule as we have ever been, we are counting on those members to stand by their votes on H.R. 3371 - their support in the last Congress rings hollow to us if the commitment to a strong new regulation isn't there this time. That's not to mention the impact of this legislation on other training and safety initiatives."

Reducing pilot fatigue in the form of revised pilot flight and duty time regulations has been at the top of the NTSB's Most Wanted List for over twenty years. The FAA attempted to issue new regulations in the mid-90's, but was unsuccessful due to intense opposition from industry stakeholders. The FAA and Administrator Randy Babbitt have made issuing a new fatigue regulation their top priority, and the agency is currently in the process of reviewing comments on its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, published last September. A final rule must be issued by an August 1 deadline set by Congress in PL 111-216.

"If there was an easy, pain-free solution, this would have been done years ago," added Scott Maurer of Moore, South Carolina, who lost his thirty year old daughter Lorin. "You know that the ATA is lurking in the shadows and watching this process, and if the supplemental carriers are able to get their way in avoiding these regulations, the major airlines are going to be next in line looking for the same preferential treatment. And we are going to end up right back where we started, with decades-old guidelines with no basis in science, with tired regional airline pilots being pushed to the limit, and once again the flying public and safety being the losers in the whole process."