

Call on Regional Airlines to Quickly Comply with New Guidelines

Buffalo, New York - November 5, 2013 – In response to this afternoon's joint press conference held by the Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration announcing the release of new pilot training requirements for the nation's Part 121 air carriers, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' issued the following statement:

"This upcoming February 12th will mark the fifth anniversary of a tragic winter night in Clarence Center, New York where fifty-one lives were needlessly lost when Flight 3407 crashed into the Wielinski family home on Long Street. A National Transportation Safety Board investigation uncovered numerous deficiencies at regional air carrier Colgan Air, with those in the realm of pilot training being the most prominent. Today we are pleased to see that DOT and FAA have released new training guidelines that will significantly raise the bar for all Part 121 passenger carriers in our country, particularly the regional airlines.

"Make no mistake about it; Flight 3407 was a direct result of two critical factors: an archaic approach to pilot training at some small regional carriers like Colgan that was significantly substandard to the best practice training methods employed by our country's mainline carriers, and an industry code share model that places enormous economic pressure on regional carriers to do the bare minimum to comply with federal standards in the quest to come in with the lowest bid possible.

"Today we have taken a significant step to address the first issue, and in doing so have positioned ourselves to take pilot training into the twenty-first century after nearly fifteen years of fits and starts. First and foremost, this rule will enable our pilots to take better advantage of all the advances in flight simulation technology that have been made. Secondly, a better focus on training pilots to react to stall warnings while the autopilot is engaged may have made the difference in the case of Flight 3407, and today's announcement calls for more robust scenarios for how stall recognition and recovery techniques are trained. Finally, in a technologically advanced era where the vast majority of accidents and incidents owe to human factors, this new rule takes a fresh approach to remedial training, another key element to our stated goal to 'Put the Best Pilots in the Cockpit and Set Them Up for Success.'

"To be fair, we must acknowledge our disappointment that this final rule did not include the originally proposed provision to require all training to be conducted in a full crew environment. As we have seen with Flight 3407 and so many recent crashes, crew coordination in the cockpit is of paramount importance to the safe operation of a flight, and requiring Line Oriented Flight Training would have provided a tremendous mechanism for enhancing this critical element of piloting.

"Even with today's accomplishment, our focus remains forward. As we learned the hard way with Flight 3407, complacency is always the enemy. First and foremost, this new rule will only be as strong as the degree to which it is implemented and enforced. Even though the rule calls for a five year compliance window, we call on all carriers, in particular the regionals, to meet these requirements as quickly as possible. We also call on regional carriers to train their young first officers in a full crew environment, as they will receive great benefit from conducting their training partnered with a captain as opposed to another first officer. And to every pilot, airline official, FAA field inspector, and every other person who plays a part in making our aviation system the safest in the world, please let the dear price that our loved ones paid serve as a reminder of the tremendous responsibility that you are entrusted with on a daily basis by each and every passenger boarding a plane.

"Additionally, there are still a few provisions of Public Law 111-216 that remain to be implemented, most notably, the creation of an electronic pilots record database. In memory of our loved ones, we look forward to continuing to collaborate with FAA, DOT, and OMB to see these through to completion. Through each of these individual provisions, we collectively continue to demonstrate that we are doing everything in our power to make sure that the mistakes of Flight 3407 are never repeated again.

"Lastly, many thanks are in order for making today possible. At the top of the list are Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx and FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. Their level of engagement with us has sent a strong message that safety must always come first, and just as importantly, they delivered on what they told us they would do. We would be remiss if we did not recognize their predecessors, former Secretary Ray LaHood and former Administrator Randy Babbitt, who also were tremendously supportive of our efforts every step of the way. We also cannot say thank you enough to the countless staff members at FAA, DOT, and the Office of Management and Budget, with a special acknowledgement to Peggy Gilligan, FAA's Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety, for their thankless efforts behind the scenes that brought this to fruition. And we must also give great credit to Chairman Debbie Hersman and the team at the National Transportation Safety Board, who have been so supportive of our group and our cause from Day One.

"Today's announcement once again serves as a powerful reminder of what can be achieved on Capitol Hill when people work together. This is a result of a law that was unanimously passed by both Houses of Congress, thanks in large part to the efforts of Aviation Subcommittees in both houses. We must recognize the members and their staffs, to include Senators Cantwell and Ayotte, and Representatives LoBiondo and Larsen, as well as their predecessors who did so much to make this possible including former Senator Dorgan and former Representatives Oberstar and Costello, and Congressmen Mica and Petri. We also thank Senators Rockefeller and Thune for their leadership and support at the full committee level as well.

"We cannot say enough about the Western New York congressional delegation and their staffs, to include Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, Representatives Slaughter, Higgins, Reed, and Collins, and former Representatives Lee and Hochul who have been there with us arm-in-arm every step of the way. And we also are thankful for every member, Senator or Representative, Democrat, Republican, or Independent, who supported us through votes, sponsoring legislation, or signing onto letters.

"We must also express our heartfelt appreciation for Captain Sullenberger and First Officer Skiles, the crew of the Miracle on the Hudson, for the incredible expertise and support they have provided us. And there are so many others, too many to be named, who have encouraged our efforts along the way, and we thank them all for all that has been done of behalf of our loved ones to make our skies the safest that they can be."