

Family Group Praises Duckworth and CAPA for Highlighting the Importance of Experience

Buffalo, New York - November 1, 2017 - Fighting back against continued maneuvering by regional airlines and their lobbyists, the 'Families of Continental Flight 3407' called on the Trump administration to continue to resist their efforts to weaken the 2010 aviation safety law. The latest attempt by regionals to undermine the new first officer entry-level qualification requirements involved the public release of a two-year-old proposal authored by an industry-dominated committee which calls on the FAA Administrator to approve the awarding of additional flight hour credit to entry-level pilots for completing classroom and simulator training administered by the airlines themselves.

"This is just another attempt by the regionals and their lobbyists to sneak a Trojan horse right under the noses of DOT and FAA," stated Scott Maurer of Palmetto, Florida, who lost his thirty-year-old daughter Lorin in the crash. "If the regionals believe that they have identified room for improvement in their entry-level training programs in terms of preparing young pilots for the highly automated Part 121 environment, we are all for them beefing these programs up. However, we feel that it is patently unfair to the flying public to sacrifice actual flying experience in exchange for these enhancements. There is no reason that we shouldn't be able to have both, especially when these new experience requirements have resulted in over eight years of ZERO fatalities, the safest period of commercial aviation travel in our history by over three times. For those of us who lost loved ones in the very preventable crash of Flight 3407, the watered-down flight time requirements put forth by this proposal are hauntingly reminiscent to the previous guidelines that allowed the captain of Flight 3407 to get hired at a regional airline with barely 600 hours."

The report in question was produced by the Air Carrier Training Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ACT ARC) featuring industry lobbying groups Regional Airline Association and Airlines for America. It seeks to award a credit of as many as 750 flight hours towards meeting stronger experience requirements for entry-level pilots instituted by the FAA in 2013 in accordance with the 2010 Airline Safety Act, which was unanimously passed by both houses of Congress. Prior to the safety law, regional airlines were able to hire first officers with as little as 250 hours of experience.

"Call it whatever you want - a bailout, a giveaway, a handout - it is sad to see these lobbyists continue to push to lower the bar for the weakest links in our commercial aviation system, the Great Lakes' and Mesa's of the world who want to spend the bare minimum when it comes to their pilots and their training," declared John Kausner of Clarence Center, New York, who lost

his twenty-four-year-old daughter Ellyce when the plane crashed less than a mile from their family home. "Despite countless failed check rides throughout his career that screamed otherwise, our captain proved that you could get hired by a regional airline with minimum experience and accumulate thousands of hours in the Part 121 environment by relying on autopilot and other technology available in this day and age. However, when you are on approach to Buffalo, New York or Pierre, South Dakota in the dead of winter and that autopilot disengages and you have to rely on the airmanship and hand-flying instincts developed way back in your early days as a pilot, that is where the system failed my daughter. And that is the worst-case scenario that we need to be preparing our pilots for, not more knob-turning and button-pushing as these regional airlines would have you believe."

In support of their position, the family group highlighted statements from Senator Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, a decorated military pilot, and the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations (CAPA), emphasizing the importance of actual hand-flying experience for young pilots. In part, CAPA's statement declared, "While we believe EQP is an enhancement for pilot training, it alone does not create a safer pilot. Airmanship skills cannot be attained through ground training; they are learned, developed and honed only through actual flight experience... CAPA does not support any reduction in the already low, minimum flight time pathways established by the FAA."

"Kudos to Senator Duckworth for reiterating what 'Miracle on the Hudson' pilots Sully Sullenberger and Jeff Skiles have been saying all along - that classroom and simulator training events are not a substitute for actual hand-flying flying experience - and for once again reminding us that the current standards are working as intended in terms of making our aviation system even safer," stated Karen Eckert of Williamsville, New York, who lost her sister and noted 9/11 widow and activist Beverly Eckert. "We also want to spotlight some of the key points made by CAPA in this report that we feel have been conveniently overlooked, which acknowledge the value of this EQP program in preparing young pilots to work for a Part 121 carrier while still emphasizing that 'credit hours for EQP are not an adequate substitute for manual, stick-and-rudder skills required to fly in today's challenging airline flight operations environment.' In honor of our loved ones, we will continue our fight for a TRUE 'One Level of Safety' between our nation's regional and mainline carriers, in particular ensuring that our nation's first officer qualification requirements remain the strongest in the world, both in regards to the quality of the training AND the quantity of actual flying experience."