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May 20, 2024

The Honorable Michael Whitaker  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Whitaker,

I write to express concerns with the FAA's expansion of Collegiate Training Initiative (CTI) Schools. Over the course of thirteen weeks, my staff and I tried repeatedly to schedule a call with you to discuss this issue. The below questions and concerns detail what I had hoped to discuss with you.

In February, the FAA announced that it was working to expand CTI programs to bolster the air traffic controller pipeline. The goal of the Enhanced CTI program is to allow students to bypass the FAA Academy and directly begin training at an air traffic facility after graduation. While I am not opposed to expanded utilization of CTI programs, I am concerned that the FAA will not require parity between the methods and standards used at the FAA Academy and the methods and standards used at CTI schools.

During a February staff briefing on this issue, it was not clear that the FAA will require CTI instructors to have the same qualifications as Academy instructors. All instructors should be Certified Air Traffic Controllers. It should go without saying that in order to be an effective teacher, the teacher must have a mastery of the material that can only be achieved through training, experience and repetition.

It was also concerning that the FAA was not clear on whether final evaluations at CTI schools would be conducted by FAA evaluators. I understand that this will be one of the final steps to graduate from a CTI program and begin training at an air traffic facility. It is imperative that students who attend CTI programs are held to the same standard of evaluation as students who attend the FAA Academy. One way to ensure that uniformity is to require that all final evaluations are conducted by FAA evaluators.

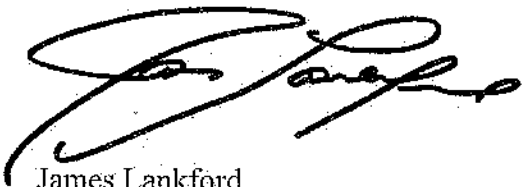
In the press release that announced the expansion of CTI programs, it states that students must still pass the Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA) exam in order to become a certified air traffic controller. However, in the staff briefing it was noted that students who fail the ATSA exam could still be hired by the FAA if they gain experience working for a contract tower. Given the key role air traffic controllers play in the safety of our national airspace, passing the ATSA exam must remain a requirement no matter what training track a student chooses.

Finally, expansion of CTI programs is a significant departure from how air traffic control training has operated for seven decades with one centralized, standardized academy with rigorous control and oversight. As such, I highly urge the FAA to start small with one or two Enhanced CTI programs so the FAA can closely monitor the success of these schools and students.

I would appreciate answers to the following questions no later than June 15, 2024:

1. The FAA has told my staff and me that it wants to ramp up the Academy in Oklahoma City. What steps has FAA taken to increase air traffic control capacity at the Academy?
2. The FAA has noted that hiring instructors to come teach at the Academy is a roadblock to increasing controller capacity. Please provide more information on this issue and how often the FAA accepts applications for instructors. Please also include how many applications the FAA has received in the past year.
3. Is the FAA planning on requiring CTI instructors to be certified air traffic controllers? Is there any discrepancy between requirements for CTI instructors and requirements for Academy instructors?
4. Is the FAA planning on requiring FAA evaluators to conduct the final evaluations for CTI students?
5. Is the FAA open to an absolute requirement that CTI students must take the ATSA exam in order to be hired by the FAA?
6. How does the FAA plan on ensuring the same standard of training is achieved at CTI programs that occurs at the Academy?
7. Will Enhanced CTI programs be completely responsible for purchasing their own equipment without federal financial assistance?
8. Will the FAA consider a slow roll out of this new program by starting with only one or two Enhanced CTI programs?
9. The FAA Academy course curriculum is closely guarded at the Academy. How will CTI schools guard the integrity of the curriculum?

In God We Trust,



James Lankford  
United States Senator