MAZIE K. HIRONO
HAWAII

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1104

June 1, 2020

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dr. Robert Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Secretary Chao, Secretary Azar, Acting Secretary Wolf, and Director Redfield,

The State of Hawaii is strongly impacted by air travel, as are other non-contiguous areas in the United States. In order to begin safe and incremental air travel during this pandemic, appropriate procedures that protect the health and welfare of workers and the traveling public must be put in place at all airports nationwide. Establishing clear standards is necessary to restore public confidence in resuming air travel in a safe manner. I ask that your agencies work together to develop and implement cohesive federal standards and requirements on air travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently, there exists a patchwork and inconsistent system of policies that airports, businesses, and aviation stakeholders have developed and implemented that have been informed by voluntary guidance issued by the Administration. U.S. airlines have adopted policies requiring passengers to wear face masks while onboard aircraft and some airlines check passenger temperatures before they board the aircraft.[1] At least one airport has also started screening passengers' body temperatures before they reach the Transportation Security Administration checkpoint.[2] Disagreements have also arisen between airports and airlines as to what processes should be implemented.[3] The establishment of different standards by airports and airlines create inconsistent procedures that burden the flying public and does not ensure uniform safety. To

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[1] https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/2020/05/12/coronavirus-temperature-checks-coming-airport/3116228001/
[2] https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/flying-out-of-paine-field-in-everett-the-airport-will-check-your-body-temperature-first/
[3] https://www.politico.com/newsletters/morning-transportation/2020/05/27/airports-airlines-split-over-temperature-checks-787906

prevent this from happening, the federal government must step in and determine what is required to safely travel by air.

The Administration is reportedly preparing to begin checking passengers' temperatures at roughly a dozen airports.[4] I am concerned that this is going to be the primary mechanism for detecting sick passengers rather than one component of a comprehensive plan to protect all travelers, airline crew, and airport workers. Evidence suggests that temperature checks would not be sufficient for detecting infected travelers and preventing spread of COVID-19. While we are still learning about this virus, it is clear that individuals with COVID-19 can be infectious while being asymptomatic. Moreover, travelers could defeat such temperature screening by taking fever-reducing medicine. Temperature scans on their own would fail to detect both of these groups of travelers.

Past efforts using temperature scans in airports appear to corroborate its ineffectiveness at detecting people with COVID-19. A February report found that 30,000 temperature screenings of individuals in 11 airports had not detected a single case of COVID-19.[5] Based on this early experience, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reportedly warned the Administration against using thermal scanning and believes CDC resources should instead be directed where there is impact and probability of mission success.[6] If conducted, temperature screenings need to be combined with other measures to ensure that travelers and workers alike are protected. Without a strong coordinated system in place, restoration of air travel will be beset by COVID-19 flare-ups possibly leading to the resumption of stay-at-home orders and quarantines.

As a result, I ask that the federal government work collectively to establish comprehensive nationwide standards that protects air travelers from the time they enter an airport to start their air travel to their last step at their destination airport. These standards may need to differentiate between domestic and international travel but should be based on guidance from medical and public health professionals. In addition, workers who will be relied upon to carry out any standards, whether they are federal employees, contractors, or private workers throughout the airport, should be involved in its development. At a minimum, these standards should include:

- A system for screening all passengers based on the most current science available on COVID-19 which includes the consideration of testing for COVID-19 or preclearing passengers who have very recently tested negative for COVID-19;
- Procedures for maintaining proper distancing at checkpoints, in lines, in waiting areas, and other points of the travel process;
- Strategies for reducing the wait times at security checkpoints which includes the consideration of opening more lanes or increasing personnel;

[4] https://www.wsj.com/articles/tsa-preparing-to-check-passenger-temperatures-11589579570
[5] https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/19/health/coronavirus-airport-temperature-checks/index.html
[6] https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2020/05/09/white-house-push-airport-fever-screenings-overrules-cdc-scientists/3097158001/

- Requirements of personal protective equipment, cleaning, and sanitation;
- The ability to respond to regional or seasonal flare ups of COVID-19;
- Procedures for a traveler who fails to pass an initial screening;
- Procedures to handle people denied the ability to travel;
- Protections for all frontline workers who come into close or regular contact with the public or others in the airport;
- A review mechanism, to ensure that the standards can be quickly updated to reflect changing understandings of COVID-19;
- Consideration of an individual's right to privacy and civil liberties; and
- Consideration of what additional authority may be needed to implement these standards.

Hawaii has in place a mandatory 14-day quarantine for travelers arriving in our state. The state has established a system for checking the temperatures of passengers arriving on domestic flights and for passengers departing on inter-island flights. Additionally, air travel passengers are tracked to verify that they are following the 14-day quarantine order. Honolulu International Airport is also one of 20 airports in the nation that has full-time CDC staff intended to limit the introduction of infectious diseases into the United States.[7] In January, the federal government designated Honolulu International Airport as one of thirteen airports to receive flights from China if a passenger was found to have COVID-19. Should the Administration establish a system of COVID-19 screenings in a limited number of airports, Honolulu International Airport should be included because of the actions it has already taken to respond to the COVID-19.

Although Hawaii is uniquely dependent on air travel, people all over the nation rely on flights to see friends and family, conduct business, and reach destinations faster than other modes of travel. We all want a successful restoration of air travel. This will only be possible if strong standards are in place to protect the health and safety of travelers and employees.

Sincerely,

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

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[7] https://hidot.hawaii.gov/coronavirus/