

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 4, 2024

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chair
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rick Larson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, Chair Graves, and Ranking Member Larson:

As you reconcile differences between the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (S.1939), and the House-passed Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act (H.R.3935), we urge you to include Section 635 Protecting Public Gatherings of H.R.3935 in the final bill to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) through FY2028.

Under Section 635, the FAA Administrator would establish a process for law enforcement and event organizers to secure temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) for unmanned aircraft operations in close proximity to eligible outdoor concerts, festivals, and other large outdoor public gatherings, for the duration of these events.

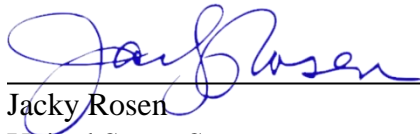
Shortly after September 11th, Congress required FAA to issue TFRs for “major sporting events” including MLB games, NCAA Division 1 Football games, and NASCAR races. However, FAA is not currently required to issue TFRs for concerts or festivals, even though concerts and festivals often occur in the same or similar venues, and have as many or more attendees as major sporting events. While the FAA has the general authority to issue TFRs for non-sporting live events, the process is opaque and inconsistent, which hinders the ability of law enforcement and event organizers to plan for and mitigate the risks of UAVs over a crowd. Section 635 would require FAA to establish a clear process for law enforcement to secure TFRs for unmanned aircraft operations in close proximity to eligible outdoor concerts, festivals, and other large outdoor public gatherings.

In the decade since Congress directed FAA to develop a plan to integrate unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) into the national airspace, UAS operations have proliferated. As of 2023, FAA has registered nearly 800,000 drones and about 1.6 million recreational drones and model aircraft. Moreover, FAA anticipates that the number of drones operating in the U.S. airspace will continue to grow over the next few years, with the commercial drone fleet expanding to between 933,000 to 966,00 by FY2026.

Undoubtedly, drones have become an increasingly valuable tool across many industries from agriculture, to surveying, to various safety and security uses. Beyond their commercial benefits, drones are also quickly becoming a favorite outdoor activity for Americans. While drones have many benefits to our economy, they can also present safety and security concern to our airspace and to the public. As such, we strongly urge inclusion of Section 635 in the final bill to reauthorize the FAA through FY2028.

Thank you for your consideration, and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator