

October 21, 2021

Hon. Steve Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson:

We, the undersigned federal labor unions representing Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees, demand that the FAA withdraw language in the FY2022 budget reprogramming request that seeks to separate and realign research, development, test and evaluation functions of the **William J. Hughes Technical Center**, (“WJHTC”), and immediately halt any further efforts to diminish the WJHTC.

The William J. Hughes Technical Center is a world-renown aviation research, development, and test and evaluation facility responsible for maintaining and modernizing the U.S. air transportation system. It completes its mission through centralized, state-of-the-art laboratories, test facilities, and support facilities that optimize U.S. air traffic control, communications, navigation, airports, aircraft safety, and security. The WJHTC is tasked, among its other missions, with supporting the nation's Next Generation Air Transportation System, called NextGen.

It is within the FAA’s Congressional and statutory mandate to advance the NextGen program that we believe your administration has taken liberties from which to augment both spirit and intent of the law, to further position federal assets, programs, and jobs for weakening and outsourcing. FAA leadership has not been fully transparent in its communications with Congress, labor unions, and other stakeholders regarding your plans for and movements within WJHTC. The budget funding for the System Planning and Resource Management program at the WJHTC was slashed by approximately 68% for FY2022, which indicates the FAA is already implementing a reorganization. A reorganization is inconsistent with appropriation law, appropriation acts, and the intent of Congress.

We adamantly disagree with the claim cited in an FAA response to a request from U.S. Representative Jeff Van Drew (NJ-2) to halt the dismantling of the Tech Center, that the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 and the sections cited within, Section 545 and 711, provides any authority to realign any part of the FAA, much less “splitting” the William J. Hughes Technical Center into three disparate parts. The authority cited in the FAA response is not reflected in the law. The law only requires FAA create two positions: Chief Technology Officer and Assistant Secretary for Research and Development. The proposed splitting or reorganization of the WJHTC is not required for FAA to comply with the law.

Your April 8, 2020 letter to Representative Van Drew made clear your goal to make the WJHTC “an even more attractive partner for public-private partnerships with industry”. The work performed by union members at the WJHTC is inherently governmental and too important to outsource. In their work to preserve the safety of the flying public, our federal government researchers are accountable to the traveling public and taxpayers, not profiting business leaders or their shareholders. The reorganization is seemingly a means to foster contracting out at the expense of our members’ jobs and directly conflicts with President Biden’s Executive Order 14025: Worker Organizing and Empowerment.

Without a more detailed response from FAA regarding its plans for the WJHTC, it is difficult to determine how many of the 5,000 employees at the Tech Center may be affected by a reorganization, splitting, or dismantling. However, based on the information we do have, it is reasonable to conclude that all employees—among them, more than 1153 union members from six unions—will endure relocation or termination through a Reduction in Force. As the FAA positions federal assets for outsourcing, five thousand engineers, research specialists, computer scientists, analysts, mathematicians, and other support staff will lose their jobs at the Tech Center location.

We request that you cease immediately any further action on closing or splitting or reorganizing the WJHTC.

For any questions or additional information, please contact any of the following union representatives for further assistance: Julie Tippens (AFGE), Hasan Soloman (IAMAW), Steve Lenkart (NFFE).

Signed,

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW)
National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE)

CC: The White House
U.S. Senator Bob Menendez
U.S. Senator Cory Booker
U.S. Representative Jeff Van Drew
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Commerce Science, and Transportation
House Committee on Appropriations
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure