



June 15, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

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

Dear Secretary Azar and Secretary Chao:

I write to urge the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), to immediately implement a national aviation screening system for domestic and international passengers to keep the traveling public and workforce safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we work at all levels to forge a pathway toward a safe and responsible economic recovery, it is clear that we need a federal approach to aviation screening to instill public confidence in the safety of travel and prevent a viral resurgence due to interstate and international travel.

There has been significant public interest in a national approach to aviation safety amid COVID-19. On April 29, 2020, Senators Blumenthal and Markey transmitted a letter to DOT and HHS requesting an emergency rule requiring face masks for all individuals engaged in air travel. On May 11, 2020, and May 18, 2020, Senator Cantwell sent letters to HHS and DOT requesting clear, uniform, national COVID-19 guidelines for the aviation sector. They and other members of Congress understand that any state-based or regional approach would create unnecessary duplication, leave significant gaps, and fail to ensure the safety of the traveling public. Washington State concurs with this assessment.

To date, there is a wholly inadequate patchwork of protections, such as a pilot program to check passengers' temperatures at only specified airports and an airline-by-airline approach to requiring facial coverings onboard. Such a patchwork leaves significant gaps. For example, it enables a symptomatic traveler to enter the U.S. aviation system through an airport that does not screen, take a connecting flight without a mask, and spread COVID-19 droplets on high-touch areas during multiple flights – potentially transmitting coronavirus to hundreds of other passengers. The science is clear that airplanes, and mass transit in general, present greater risk of



transmission because of the confined spaces where safe distancing may not be possible. Our nation's current approach improperly places the burden for protecting the public on state and local governments, leaves millions of passengers at risk, and fails to instill public confidence. It achieves neither our economic nor our public health goals.

A comprehensive national aviation screening system should include, at a minimum, the following components:

- Collecting adequate contact and travel information to aid in contact tracing efforts by state and local public health.
- Clearly communicating information about protecting themselves and others from exposure to passengers, workers, and the public.
- Screening both passengers and workers for symptoms, including temperature checks, prior to travel.
- Requiring all passengers and workers to wear face masks or cloth face coverings.
- Frequently cleaning high touch surfaces.
- Making hand sanitizer readily available.
- Offering testing at airports for all international arrivals and any other individuals who have mild symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

It is clear that if we hope to restart the U.S. economy in a manner that is safe and responsible, without significant interstate spread of COVID-19, we will need a comprehensive national aviation screening system. I respectfully request that you prioritize implementation of guidance, regulations, and resources to implement this system. Additionally, we urge HHS and DOT to begin developing national guidance and screening systems for other interstate mass transit, as people on interstate buses or trains could become exposed to symptomatic travelers who are screened out of aviation travel and choose to use other forms of mass transit.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact the Director of my Washington, D.C. office, Casey Katims, at [Casey.Katims@gov.wa.gov](mailto:Casey.Katims@gov.wa.gov).

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee  
Governor

CC: Robert Redfield, MD, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
David Pekoske, Administrator, Transportation Security Administration  
The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member, Senate Commerce Committee