

United States Senate

September 28, 2021

The Honorable Steve Dickson
Administrator
U.S. Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson:

We are writing to express concern over proposed changes to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) William J. Hughes Technical Center. Located in Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey, the FAA Tech Center is the agency's independent lab for research, development, testing, and evaluation. It is our understanding that a reprogramming request has been submitted that would split up research and development, testing and evaluation, and labs and facilities into three different FAA organizations, each to be based out of FAA Headquarters.

As FAA plans for the future of the NextGen program, some changes within FAA will be necessary in order to remain in compliance with requirements in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018. As you know, required changes include the appointment of a Chief Technology Officer and an Assistant Administrator for Research and Development. While these changes can be implemented in a way that maintains the overall function of the Tech Center, we are concerned that proposed changes may extend far beyond what is required, and may jeopardize the integrity, efficiency, and effectiveness of the nation's premier aviation research facility.

The William J. Hughes Tech Center plays a key role within FAA. It offers world class laboratories and serves as a central hub for research, development, testing, and evaluation. As emerging technologies in Unmanned Aircraft Systems and developments in commercial aviation continue to advance, the Tech Center is positioned as essential to the future of aviation. The central management, yet collaborative coordination, of each of these interdependent functions creates a synergy that allows for more effective and efficient operations. This centralized model is in line with best practices for research centers and is utilized at many other research facilities across several federal agencies and departments.

The William J. Hughes Tech Center is also vitally important to its regional economy, both because it currently employs approximately 4,000 individuals and because it is central to many economic development initiatives. The Greater Atlantic City region is economically distressed due to historic reliance on the casino and tourism industries, and extensive efforts are underway to diversify the local economy by attracting new aviation related businesses. Due to its prominent role, resources from the Tech Center are often sought out by private sector and academic stakeholders for collaboration, making the center a major asset in regional economic

development initiatives. Any changes that remove jobs or diminish the prominence of the Tech Center could undermine efforts to revitalize this distressed economy.

The William J. Hughes Technical Center is vitally important to New Jersey and a critical asset to the FAA. We strongly urge you to avoid any actions to restructure the Tech Center that would threaten its efficiency of operations. To that end, we respectfully request additional information on any potential reprogramming requests and plans to restructure or reorganize the center's reporting structure, including all personnel moves, that the FAA has developed or considered.

Additionally, we invite you to join us in visiting the facility in the near future in order to personally observe the impressive operations and work of the hard-working men and women at the Tech Center. Thank you in advance for your consideration and attention to this matter, and for your partnership in ensuring the success of the FAA Tech Center, and the community it serves.

Sincerely,

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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Menendez', written over a horizontal line.

Robert Menendez
United States Senator