

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 6, 2020

Mr. Barry L. Biffle
President and Chief Executive Officer
Frontier Airlines
4545 Airport Way
Denver, CO 80239

Dear Mr. Biffle,

We are writing to express our concern regarding your company's recent announcement that it will charge customers for a "More Room" seating option to guarantee that the middle seat is unoccupied during a flight. Frontier's plan to charge customers a fee from \$39 to \$89 for appropriate space, in addition to the passenger's ticket and other ancillary fees charged by Frontier, is outrageous given the spread of the coronavirus. The flying public should not be charged extra to stay healthy on flights.

We are currently facing a global health pandemic that has already killed more than 70,000 Americans. To reduce the spread of the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) contagion, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended limiting face-to-face contact. As prescribed by the CDC, social distancing, which means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home, is practiced by staying at least six feet or about two arms' length from other people.¹

Unfortunately, no matter how you configure airplane seating, social distancing at six feet on a flight is difficult. Essential travelers are already risking their health, and they should not be penalized with an additional ancillary fee to practice social distancing to the best of their ability. While your competitors such as Delta Airlines have rightfully decided to block off middle seats without a charge to passengers, Frontier Airlines has made the bewildering decision to punish the very customers it needs most.² Further, this fee will undoubtedly fall most heavily on vulnerable populations. Those who may be more susceptible to COVID-19, because of age or other underlying health condition, will feel most compelled to pay for their safety, even though they are the least likely to be able to afford the extra charge.

Even before this global health pandemic, airlines such as yours blindsided travelers with exorbitant charges at checkout caused by unexpected fees for basic aviation services. This price gouging has grown exponentially into a common business practice over the last decade. The top ten airlines worldwide collected \$35.2 billion in ancillary fees in 2018, up from just \$1.2 billion in 2007. In 2019, U.S. domestic airlines collected \$5.7 billion and \$2.8 billion in just baggage and reservation

¹ "Social Distancing, Quarantine and Isolation," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

² Andrew, Scottie, "Frontier Airlines will let you pay to keep the middle seat empty on your flight," CNN Travel, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/frontier-airlines-middle-seat-empty-trnd/index.html>

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fees, respectively.³ It is deeply disappointing that Frontier Airlines has chosen to impose a stay-healthy fee on top of these other ancillary fees.

At a time when most of the public does not feel comfortable flying, we strongly believe that additional fees such as the “More Room” option will further discourage the flying public from participating in an already wearying endeavor, as well as penalize those who remain forced to travel.

We understand that this is a difficult time for airlines, and we value how air travel connects our country and world. That is why Congress approved billions of dollars in grants and loans to preserve this industry. It is inexplicable that airlines would request public financing to preserve their business during a health crisis and then impose additional fees on their customers who seek to preserve their health. We strongly urge you to immediately reconsider this misguided policy and to take further steps to protect your passengers without imposing unreasonable and disproportional fees.

Sincerely,



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

³ “Ancillary Fees,” Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Department of Transportation,
<https://www.bts.gov/topics/airlines-and-airports/ancillary-fees>