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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4209

July 11, 2019

Mr. Daniel K. Elwell
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue Southwest
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

I am writing to express my concern that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has not begun implementation of the Seat Egress in Air Travel (SEAT) Act, which will have a significant impact on the safety and health of airline passengers.

On October 3, 2019, Congress passed the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2018, which reauthorized the FAA for five years. A provision that I authored with Representative Adam Kinzinger to combat shrinking airline seats, the SEAT Act, was included in this important legislation. This bipartisan bill directs the FAA to establish minimum seat size and distance between rows of seats on commercial aircraft to protect the safety of the flying public.

It has been over nine months since this bill was passed into law, and it appears that zero action has been taken to advance this critical matter. The flying public deserves more.

As you may know, the average seat pitch has dropped from 35 inches before airline deregulation in the 1970's to about 31 inches today. The average width of an airline seat has also shrunk from 18 inches to about 16 ½ inches.¹ While seat sizes have been shrinking, the average size of Americans has been growing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the average man in 1960 weighed 166 pounds, and the average woman weighed 140 pounds. Now, the average man is 196 pounds and the average woman is 166 pounds – and both are about an inch taller.²

¹ <https://fortune.com/2015/09/12/airline-seats-shrink/>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/12/look-at-how-much-weight-weve-gained-since-the-1960s/?utm_term=.09c26a0e15f2

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In addition to being less comfortable, serious safety and health questions remain. For instance, doctors warn of deep vein thrombosis which can afflict passengers who don't move their legs enough on longer flights.

Congress sent a clear signal to the FAA in October when it included the SEAT Act in its five-year reauthorization of the agency. I respectfully request that the FAA provide an update on the finalization of this rule and the steps that are being taken to meet the one-year deadline, as required by law.

Please do not hesitate to contact Alex Schnelle in my office at 202-225-33265 or alex.schnelle@mail.house.gov, if you have any questions related to this request.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress