

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 9, 2026

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen,

Thank you for your attention to helicopter safety. As you know, helicopter safety and noise concerns are prominent issues in the New York and New Jersey region and are a top priority for Members representing these constituencies. Our region's airspace is one of the most complex in the world, and beneath it lies some of the most densely populated areas in the country. Last spring's string of tragedies, including the tragic helicopter crash in Jersey City that killed a family of five and the pilot, highlighted the consequences of inadequate oversight of helicopter safety. Any comprehensive helicopter safety legislation should consider our region, and we urge the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (the "Committee") to work with our delegation to ensure this vital piece of legislation addresses critical safety issues specific to our region.

As you know, the New York New Jersey Metropolitan area is the busiest airspace in the United States, and the second busiest in the world behind London. The area is served by three major airports, including Newark Liberty International Airport, John F. Kennedy International Airport, and LaGuardia Airport, as well as numerous general aviation airports and heliports. According to Port Authority of New York and New Jersey data, the region's airports handled over 1.2 million flights in 2024.¹ Adding to the complexity, helicopter flights in the area are constant. According to data compiled by the New York City Council, a total of 8,848 helicopter flights went over New York City land or water in May 2023.²

A large portion of these flights are non-essential, with an estimated forty-three percent being tours originating from the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, the Kearny Heliport in New Jersey, and the Linden Airport in New Jersey. For years, our constituents, air traffic controllers, and Members of Congress have been raising safety concerns regarding the volume of non-essential helicopter traffic in our region. Unfortunately, on April 10, 2025, a tour helicopter flight carrying a family of five crashed into the Hudson River, killing everyone on board, including the pilot. This tragedy and the tragedy at DCA involving a military helicopter and a commercial plane demonstrate the grave consequences of over-congested airspace and the dangers that helicopters can pose.

A bipartisan coalition from the New York and New Jersey area has tirelessly tried to work with the Federal Aviation Administration ("FAA") to address our region's safety and noise issues. We've drafted letters, invited the agency to our districts to witness the issue first-hand, and drafted legislation to hold the agency accountable. Unfortunately, the FAA has refused to meaningfully engage with our delegation to address this issue. It is now imperative that Congress act.

Our delegation has developed several interventions to address this issue. Specifically, we are urging the Committee to include a ban on non-essential helicopter traffic in our region (H.R. 3196, the *Improving*

¹ Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, "Statistics and General Information," accessed February 19, 2026, <https://www.panynj.gov/airports/en/statistics-general-info.html>

² New York City Council, "Helicopter Noise and Safety," accessed February 19, 2026, <https://council.nyc.gov/data/helicopter-noise-and-safety/>

Helicopter Safety Act). This bill will significantly reduce the number of aircraft navigating our airspace, and increase safety for the airspace and the communities living beneath it. We also urge the Committee to include a study of how non-essential helicopters impact the safety and wellbeing of the airspace and under-route communities, and solutions for diverting helicopter traffic away from densely populated and recreational areas (H.R. 5049, the *Protecting Communities from Helicopter Noise Act*), and require air tour agreements to consider the well-being of under-route communities (H.R. 6153, the *Communities Before Air Tourism Act*). These solutions are largely bipartisan and would address critical safety and quality of life issues for our constituents.

Inclusion of Helicopter Safety Legislation

The New York and New Jersey Congressional delegation has introduced a series of bipartisan reforms that would bring relief to our constituents. The Committee should include these bills in any potential helicopter legislation.

H.R. 3196, the *Improving Helicopter Safety Act of 2025*:

This bipartisan legislation would ban all non-essential helicopter traffic within a 20-mile radius of the Statue of Liberty. Banning non-essential helicopter traffic would alleviate congestion in the airspace and improve safety for under-route communities. By significantly reducing midair conflict risks in one of the nation's most heavily trafficked and important airspaces, this bill would protect residents, visitors, and first responders while preserving access for essential helicopter operations.

H.R. 5049, the *Protecting Communities from Helicopter Noise Act*:

This bipartisan legislation requires the FAA to study the safety and health impacts of helicopters within a 20-mile radius of the Statue of Liberty. This bill also requires the FAA to examine solutions to divert helicopters away from residential and recreational areas. Helicopter tours frequently fly over densely populated areas and fly low enough to rattle apartment buildings. Low-flying helicopters are a serious safety concern for our constituents and are shown to have adverse health impacts on under-route communities

H.R. 6153, the *Communities Before Air Tourism Act*:

This bill would require voluntary air tour agreements to consider the well-being of under-route communities. This bill also enjoys regionally diverse support. Currently, the FAA and National Park Service do not consider state parks or residents of impacted communities when drafting voluntary agreements with air tour operators. This bill closes this gap by expanding the criteria used to evaluate these agreements to account for noise, safety, and quality of life impacts on neighborhoods under the route.

National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Investigation Report AIR-26-02

While the National Transportation Safety Board (“NTSB”) is still conducting its investigation into the April 10, 2025 crash, the NTSB made several recommendations from its investigation into the January 29, 2025 collision at DCA that would begin to address issues for our community.

Ensure that annual reviews of helicopter route charts are being conducted throughout the National Airspace System as required by Federal Aviation Administration Order. (A-26-24):

These annual reviews should be reported to Congress and published publicly on the FAA's website to ensure adequate oversight of this program.

Amend helicopter route design criteria and approval process to ensure that current and future route designs or design changes provide vertical separation from airport approach and departure paths. (A-26-26):

When addressing this recommendation, we encourage the Committee to include language that considers health and safety impacts to densely populated under-route communities. The April 10 crash in Jersey City happened just 75 feet away from shore, which is home to some of the most densely populated areas in the country. One of our constituents highlighted that the crash occurred near his son's daycare. If a crash were to occur on land, the casualty impacts could be severe.

Once the criteria and approval process referenced in Safety Recommendation A-26-26, review all existing helicopter routes to ensure alignment with these updated criteria. (A-26-27)

Create an objective definition of close proximity encounter and a public database of those encounters and their locations that can be used to monitor their prevalence and identify areas of potential traffic conflict for safety assurance and safety risk management. (A-26-37)

Again, thank you for bringing your attention to this critical safety issue. Addressing helicopter safety and noise has long been a priority for Members from the New York and New Jersey metropolitan area, and we encourage you to work with our delegation on any meaningful legislative package. We welcome the opportunity to meet directly to discuss these issues.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



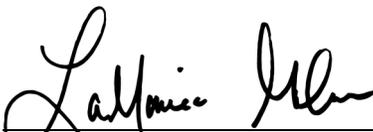
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