

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 16, 2025

Mitch Behm
Acting Inspector General
Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 20590

Acting Inspector General Behm,

We write to you to request an investigation into the Federal Aviation Administration's ("FAA") oversight and management of the helicopter tourism industry, including "aerial photography companies," which have been reported to exploit statutory loopholes to offer helicopter tours under the guise of "aerial photography" flights. Specifically, we are requesting that you investigate the FAA's oversight on industry's safety practices and how the growth of the industry is contributing to safety concerns in our skies and under-route communities.

We have continually raised our concerns directly with the FAA, including via letters sent on March 4 and May 8, 2025, and have been deeply disappointed with their response. While the FAA claims to prioritize safety, it has failed to hold helicopter tourism companies to adequate safety standards and protocols.

Six months ago, on April 10, 2025, a Bell 206 LongRanger IV helicopter on a sightseeing tour crashed into the Hudson River, killing all six people on board. The helicopter went down just 75 feet away from shore, which is home to some of the most densely populated areas in the country. This is not the first fatal helicopter crash in the area in recent years; on March 11, 2018, a sightseeing helicopter operated by FlyNYON crashed into the East River off the Upper East Side of Manhattan, killing five of the six people on board. In 2009, nine people died when a tour helicopter and private airplane collided mid-air near Hoboken. Since 2009, there have been at least 51 helicopter crashes involving tourist helicopters across the country; 11 of them were fatal.

While the National Transportation Safety Board ("NTSB") is still conducting their investigation into the April 10, 2025 crash, the NTSB made several pertinent recommendations following the March 11, 2018 FlyNYON crash that have not been addressed. Specifically, the NTSB identified a loophole that allows certain sightseeing flight companies to operate under "an aerial photography" exception to stricter federal regulations and oversight that most commercial air tours operate under. The exploitation of this, and potentially additional loopholes, is a grave safety concern, especially considering that most helicopter tours already operate under the least restrictive operating and flight rules, Part 91.

Any helicopter flight carrying paying passengers with the intention of sightseeing should be held to the highest safety standards. Even if photography is taking place, the flight should be conducted under the same operating and flight rules as other tourism companies. We strongly believe the FAA should immediately close this loophole, and that the Office of the Inspector General must also examine the prevalence of this exploitation and any additional loopholes that companies might be abusing. Therefore, we request detailed, written responses to the following questions:

Has the FAA investigated how many “sightseeing” helicopter companies, including companies that operate skydiving or other extreme sport flights, are exploiting this loophole and operating as “aerial photography” companies?

Has the FAA assessed additional loopholes that tourism companies may be exploiting to operate under less stringent flight operating rules?

How does the FAA hold these companies accountable for exploiting loopholes and putting our constituents at risk?

How often does the FAA exercise their oversight role for these companies, and is the FAA’s current approach adequate for safety?

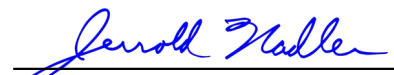
Please provide a detailed outline of how the Office of the Inspector General intends to hold the FAA accountable for any neglect in holding these companies to the highest standard of safety.

We request that your office immediately open an investigation to examine the questions and concerns raised in this letter. These safety concerns are of the highest importance to us and our constituents. Please provide an update on the status of this investigation by November 20, 2025. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress



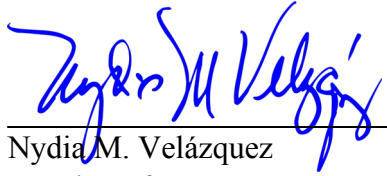
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