

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 29, 2019

The Honorable Steve Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson,

We write today regarding ongoing efforts before the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to evaluate and revise regulations pertaining to the emergency medical equipment carried by passenger airlines. Airline passengers deserve peace of mind that lifesaving help is available should a medical emergency occur in the sky. This is particularly true in the case of a drug overdose, when timely treatment can be the difference between life and death. For this reason, we were pleased to learn that when complying with the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 and evaluating the contents of Emergency Medical Kits (EMKs), the FAA determined a need to update EMKs to include opioid antagonists. This important action will help airlines and their crewmembers better meet the demands of our nation's growing opioid epidemic, and we urge the FAA to make a timely effort to direct airlines in bringing their EMKs up to these standards.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were nearly 68,000 overdose deaths across the United States last year.¹ As recent tragedies have shown, these incidents are occurring everywhere, including on airplanes. In these cases, flight attendants and volunteer medical professionals serve as first responders and rely on the supplies in FAA-regulated EMKs to assist passengers experiencing medical emergencies. Preventing delay in treatment, especially in the case of a drug overdose, is critical for passengers who may be hours away from emergency medical facilities, and it is imperative that crewmembers are equipped with the right tools and training to respond to the health needs of passengers should an incident occur.

We understand that a few commercial airlines have taken proactive steps to prepare their crewmembers in the event of a drug overdose midflight and include medical supplies to treat these emergencies in enhanced EMKs. However, there is currently no requirement from the FAA that EMKs include medication to treat overdoses in any form, and many airlines continue to fail to meet this imminent need.

For this reason, we were pleased to learn of the FAA's efforts to examine the impact of substance use disorders on the passenger airline industry when evaluating the contents of EMKs. In carrying out this review, the FAA's Office of Aerospace Medicine ultimately determined a need to update EMKs to include opioid antagonists. While this is an important step in the right direction, further action needs to be taken to ensure that this life-saving medication is carried onboard passenger aircraft.

¹ Ahmad FB, Escobedo LA, Rossen LM, Spencer MR, Warner M, Sutton P. Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts. National Center for Health Statistics. 2019.

As the FAA continues its review, we urge the agency to take adequate and timely steps to issue regulations requiring the inclusion of opioid antagonists in EMKs. In the interim, we further request that the FAA issue additional guidance and recommended actions to air carriers to encourage the expeditious and voluntary inclusion of opioid antagonists in EMKs. This public health crisis has affected communities across the country and must not be overlooked.

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator