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**COUNTY OF DELAWARE TESTIMONY FOR  
SEN. SPECTER'S FAA HEARING**

4/15/08 version

Thank you, Senator Specter and members of the hearing panel, for the opportunity to explain how changes in flight paths at Philadelphia International Airport have impacted – and distressed -- Delaware County residents.

Specifically, I want to stress how the new departure heading, implemented in December, has disrupted the lives of residents in Delaware County without achieving any benefits.

Not only do we want use of this flight path curtailed, but we want all planes departing the airport to remain over the Delaware River until they reach an altitude of 3,000 feet. We are not wavering from this position.

There is no compelling evidence from the FAA to show that putting more planes over Delaware County homes and neighborhoods will reduce flight delays at the airport.

So why subject our residents to more noise, more air pollution, and the threat of safety hazards, if it's not going to improve air service at the airport???

In all the hearings, in all the reports, in all of the FAA's statistics... NO ONE has been able to answer that question for us.

It's important to point out that three-fourths of Philadelphia's airport is located in Delaware County, a built-up suburb of Philadelphia, having about 550,000 residents. Our first-generation communities, which are densely populated, are all near the airport.

Dec. 19, 2007, was a defining moment in this whole, misguided airspace redesign plan.

Dec. 19 is when the FAA implemented a new departure heading, right over Delaware County homes, schools and businesses. Since the new departure heading went into effect, complaint calls to the Airport's noise hotline increased by a remarkable **1400 percent**.

During the three-month period **before** Dec. 19, there were an average of .54 calls per day to the noise hotline and a total of 58 calls in those three months.

During the three months **after** the change was made (between December 19<sup>th</sup> and April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008,) County residents called the Airport's noise hotline 881 times to report an airplane that was too close or too loud for comfort. That's an average of 8.23 calls per day, or a daily increase of about 1400%.

What's more disturbing is that after Dec. 19, ten percent of the complaints (88) were made between midnight and 5:00 a.m., a time when the FAA admits traffic is light. The FAA said it would only utilize this new departure heading when traffic was backed up during airport rush hours. But these headings are being used in the middle of the night, in blatant opposition to what was promised.

And these numbers are for winter. Wait until summer, when people want to have their windows open, or be outside in their yards, and are bombarded by airplane noise.

Delaware County is Ground Zero when it comes to increased air traffic in Philadelphia. And the FAA consistently fails to take into account the negative impact these flights have on the health and quality of life for people in the county. Today, I speak for those people and want to relate some of their complaints directly to you.

Terri Lunny, a resident of Middletown Township, about seven miles from the airport, works from home and can't schedule any phone calls between 3 and 5 pm because of the airplane noise. One day, airplanes were going over her house two minutes apart non-stop from 5:30 to 7:30 pm, then again from 9:30 to 10:30 pm. The next morning, airplane noise bothered her for two and a half hours.

Mary Keefer, a resident in Chester Heights, about ten miles from the airport, complained about loud flights at 3 or 3:30 am. The noise was so loud, it work her up.

One really disturbing complaint came from Barbara White, the principal at Lakeview Elementary School in Ridley Park. This school is three miles from the end of the runway. Mrs. White said flights over the school and playground on Feb. 1, 2008, were so low and loud, they frightened the students and staff.

Mrs. White has been principal at Lakeview for 14 years and the change has been very noticeable. She said that multiple overflights caused school staff to say that it felt like a subway train was going through the building.

Natalie Coleman's eight-year-old son attends the Lakeview school. He said that between 8 and 10 am, "the planes were so loud they thought they were 'in a war.' The girls got real scared and the teachers had to yell so the kids could hear them. He said that lately the noise at school 'has been real bad, we all get headaches and we are angry. At recess it is very loud and I hate it.' "

Mrs. Coleman said at her house, the new departure flights mean: "We can't sleep, my clients can't hear me on the telephone in my home office, we have seen the volume on our TV go from a 24 to a 49 just to hear it and we still hear the planes, the windows shake ... and my home value has gone down."

That's just a small sampling of the hundreds of complaints we've heard.

People are also worried about their safety. Philadelphia air traffic controllers say they are concerned about the safety of the new takeoff headings. One of the County's concerns from the beginning was the increased risk of airplane crashes or objects falling from airplanes. Before the flight changes

occurred, there were two recent instances of airplane debris falling through the roofs of Delaware County homes, miraculously resulting in no injuries.

In Delaware County, we are working to revitalize our eastern and riverfront communities, the same areas where airplane noise is now having a negative impact. The County is providing funding to these older, inner-ring suburbs to revitalize their business districts, parks, and streetscapes. We are trying to stem the tide of migration to more distant areas and encourage home ownership in these communities. But major airplane noise impacts threaten to undo this work.

The bottom line is the airspace redesign project is NOT achieving its goal of a reduction in delays at PHL. In fact, the only **reduction** we see is a reduction in property values and quality of life in our communities.

Mike Wagner, the air traffic manager at PHL, said there has been a slight reduction in delays since December 19, 2007, but it's NOT because of the airspace redesign changes. It's because there have been fewer flights.

Between January and November 2007, about 67% of PHL flights were on time. In January and February 2008, about 71% of flights were on time. Prior to December, approximately 1500 flights per day were arriving or departing. After December, about 1400 flights have been arriving or departing every day. Economic conditions, fuel costs, and larger airplanes are contributing to the reduction in flights. About 330 daily flights during the hours of 9 and 11 am and 2 and 7 pm are using the new flight headings.

Our aviation expert, Williams Aviation Consultants, estimated that the FAA's airspace redesign would reduce delays at PHL by a mere three percent, which translates to a couple of minutes. Historically, 84% of PHL delays have been caused by factors that cannot be addressed by airspace redesign, such as bad weather and equipment problems. The impacts on Delaware County residents and school children are not worth the tiny delay reductions.

Truth is, experts can manipulate these numbers, this flight date, a million ways. Two things remain clear. The FAA overestimates any benefit the airspace redesign will have; and underestimates the impact on our residents.

Delaware County Council stands strong in this battle and we are even expending tax dollars to fight these changes in court. Be we would prefer a legislative remedy. We don't want to spend tax dollars fighting the FAA, an agency that's supposed to protect people. So we are looking to members of the House and Senate to find an alternate way to accomplish these transportation goals.

We're not here to stand in the way of progress and success at the airport. The County supports a viable airport to serve the region. But putting more planes over the county is not the answer. We propose three common-sense strategies to improve airport service and reduce negative impacts on Delaware County residents:

- The FAA should encourage airlines to use other regional airports that are grossly underutilized, such as Lehigh Valley International, Atlantic City International, New Castle County, and Trenton-Mercer airports. This would take some of the pressure off of PHL and give people near those airports a more convenient way to fly.

- Based on the recent reduction in flights and the resulting reduction in delays, the FAA should consider putting a reasonable cap on the number of flights during the peak hours, consistent with the number of flights the airport can physically handle.
- The airport and airlines should also be encouraged to adopt congestion pricing, charging more for flying during peak times and less for off-peak times. In January, Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters introduced a policy to allow this. This would encourage some flyers to change their flying times to off-peak times.

A combination of these strategies would reduce the need for flying over Delaware County homes and schools at low altitudes.

Thank you very much. I'll be happy to answer questions.