

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 6, 2026

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Bedford:

We are writing to express the urgent need for greater Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) investment and efficiency at Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD). Specifically, we urge the FAA to prioritize ORD for Air Traffic Control (ATC) staffing and technology, to allow full use of ORD's runway capabilities, and to give full and fair consideration to federal grant applications to invest in ORD's Terminal Area Plan project to increase gate capacity.

As you are aware, the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act* (P.L. 119-21) contained \$12.5 billion for the FAA to invest in ATC. The Trump Administration touted this funding as being reserved for modernization of facilities, systems, equipment, and safety projects—as well as recruitment, retention, and training of air traffic controllers. In addition, the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026* (P.L. 119-75) contains \$22.2 billion for the FAA for Fiscal Year 2026, which includes funding for an additional 2,500 new air traffic controllers.

With this funding on hand and Secretary Duffy's interest in "supercharging" controller hiring and training, we urge the FAA to prioritize ORD—as the busiest airport in the country in 2025—for staffing as controllers become certified, and for technology and infrastructure upgrades. Last year, 857,392 aircraft landed or took off from ORD, which is more than any other airport in America. ORD is central to the national aviation system, as a leading hub for connections, and its prioritization will yield benefits across the country. Staffing of air traffic controllers that safely direct flights at ORD is currently well under the targets established by the FAA Air Traffic Organization (ATO) and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) in the Collaborative Workforce Plan: Chicago O'Hare Tower needs 71 controllers and it is staffed with 57 (78.1%); Chicago TRACON needs 102 and it has 77 (75.5%); and Chicago Center needs 321 and it has 273 (85%).

We also understand that the FAA is not using the full runway capacity at ORD, and we request that it do so. The FAA's full use of Runway 9R would decrease delays and improve the efficiency and safety of the Airport. Current use of only two of ORD's three available runways reduces the Airport's capacity for operations, increases congestion, and does not set the Airport up for maximum success.

Lastly, ORD's current Terminal Area Plan project—developed with and funded in tandem with the airlines—would increase gate capacity at ORD by roughly 25%. Should the Chicago Department of Aviation seek federal funding for this significant modernization effort,

we urge the FAA to give full and fair consideration of such grant applications, as this effort would also reduce congestion at the nation's busiest airport.

We ask that you consider these matters to support ORD to the best of the FAA's ability, to ensure success across the entire aviation system. We are standing by should you require further information.

We appreciate your timely attention to this matter and await your response.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator