

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

December 14, 2021

Mr. Scott Kirby  
Chief Executive Officer  
United Airlines, Inc.  
233 South Wacker Drive  
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Mr. Kirby:

We are writing today regarding the recent decision by United Airlines (hereinafter “United”) to end service to Easterwood Field Airport (CLL), in College Station, Texas, and Killeen-Fort Hood Regional Airport (GRK), in Killeen, Texas, after January 3, 2022.<sup>1</sup>

As you know, at the end of 2019 the novel coronavirus “SARS-CoV-2,” which causes “coronavirus disease 2019” or “COVID-19”, was identified in Wuhan, China. Due to a combination of factors, including obfuscation by the Chinese communist government and the transmissibility of this virus, COVID-19 rapidly spread through China and around the world. As a result, many sectors of the economy were hard hit by the ensuing economic slowdown including air transportation. In the span of a month, traveler throughput in the United States fell from over two million travelers to less than one hundred thousand and international travel was almost completely shut off as a result of governments instituting travel restrictions.<sup>2</sup> Representatives of the passenger air carrier industry mobilized to make the case for emergency Congressional assistance arguing, among other things, that your industry plays a vital role in support of America’s national security interests.

To address the devastating and unprecedented impact of COVID-19, including on your industry, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act on March 27, 2020. At roughly \$2.2 trillion, this measure was the largest emergency relief measure in U.S. history. As part of CARES, Congress created the Payroll Support Program (PSP) to provide a lifeline to the aviation industry in the form of direct assistance to passenger air carriers as grants, loans, and loan guarantees. This was done to ensure that aviation enterprises, including United, could continue to function during the pandemic, that passenger air carriers like yours would keep employees on staff and connected to their jobs, and to ensure your industry would be able to quickly resume normal operations once the economy began to recover.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Cantu, United's pull out from Killeen could cause travel price jump <https://www.kwtx.com> (2021), <https://www.kwtx.com/2021/11/07/uniteds-pull-out-killeen-could-cause-travel-price-jump/> (last visited Dec 14, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> TSA checkpoint travel numbers (current year versus prior year(s)/same weekday) | Transportation Security Administration, <https://www.tsa.gov/coronavirus/passenger-throughput> (last visited Dec 14, 2021). (See March 7, 2020 – April 7, 2020)

All told, PSP ended up costing the American taxpayer nearly \$54 billion, with United receiving almost one-fifth of that total (\$10,902,445,494) in PSP grants. Additionally, United was approved for a U.S. government loan for up to \$7,491,000,000, with at least \$520,000,000 drawn to date.<sup>3</sup> Despite the generosity of the American taxpayers to provide significant assistance to United when the outlook for your company was most dire, within months of the start of an economic recovery, United announced its intent to cut air service to 11 cities beginning in 2022, including College Station, Texas and Killeen, Texas.<sup>4</sup>

In 2020, your industry was making the case for the important role the passenger air carriers play in support of national security. In 2021, United appears poised to follow through on a decision that will impose direct harm on U.S. national security interests by suspending service to College Station and Killeen. Both cities are home to integral elements of U.S. national defense and national security infrastructure. College Station, for example, is home to Texas A&M University, the nation's largest Senior Military College, and which continually commissions more officers into the United States Armed Forces each year than any other college outside of the federal service academies. Indeed, Texas A&M University has produced leaders who have fought in every American conflict since the Spanish-American War, and eight of whom earned the Medal of Honor. Just as important, however, the Texas A&M University System in the College Station area is also a vital partner of the United States Government with regard to accelerating innovation for national security.

In October of 2020, for example, Texas A&M University, through the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES), was chosen to serve as the lead institution for the Department of Defense's University Consortium for Applied Hypersonics, a five-year, \$20 million-per-year initiative to accelerate innovation in hypersonic flight capabilities and address the nation's hypersonic needs.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in September of 2021 Texas A&M University, again through TEES, was chosen as a partner by the U.S. Army for a five-year, \$96.2 million effort supporting critical military modernization.<sup>6</sup> While these two examples are impressive in their own right, they are just the beginning. The work of Texas A&M University in supporting our nation will continue to grow

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Gatz, United Airlines updated transaction summary Loans to Air Carriers, Eligible Businesses, and National Security Businesses (2021), <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/United-Airlines-Updated-Transaction-Summary.pdf> (last visited Dec 14, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Taylor Rains, United will stop flying to 11 US cities indefinitely - see the full list Business Insider (2021), <https://www.businessinsider.com/united-will-stop-flying-to-11-us-cities-indefinitely-list-2021-11> (last visited Dec 14, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Department of Defense, Defense Department taps Texas A&M System to lead US consortium on advancing Hypersonic Flight Systems Texas A&M University Engineering (2020), <https://engineering.tamu.edu/news/2020/10/defense-department-taps-texas-am-system-to-lead-us-consortium-on-advancing-hypersonic-flight-systemsnews-post.html> (last visited Dec 14, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Seiber & Amy Halbert, Bush Combat Development Complex receives \$96.2M Army research contract Texas A&M University System Bush Combat Development Complex (2021), <https://bcdc.tamus.edu/2021/10/12/bush-combat-development-complex-receives-96-2m-army-research-contract/> (last visited Dec 14, 2021).

with the Bush Combat Development Complex, a \$200 million-plus state-of-the-art facility that broke ground in October of 2019.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to College Station, Killeen also plays a vital role in support of our national defense and national security. Killeen is home to Fort Hood, which is the largest active-duty armored post in the United States. Fort Hood is a sprawling base, which features corps-level headquarters, two Army division-level headquarters, and a corps sustainment command, in addition to six brigade combat teams, five other brigade-size formations, and several other major organizations, and every single one of these units are trained, sustained, and maintained at Fort Hood. In total, Fort Hood, and consequently Killeen, supports more than 37,000 active-duty military members, 413,341 retirees, survivors and family members, and 10,980 civilians and contractors.<sup>8</sup>

Despite current demand for air travel in the College Station and Killeen markets, and the prospect for sustained growth, United has decided to end air service to two cities which collectively represent the nation's largest active-duty armored post and a university that is one of the largest suppliers of military leaders for the U.S. Armed Forces as well as a critical partner in research and innovation affecting national security and national defense.

We believe United's decision will have a negative impact on America's national security. Additionally, because the intent of PSP was to enable passenger air carriers to resume their pre-pandemic operations and to ensure employees would not be laid off, your decision appears to violate the spirit if not the letter of the law as well as the promises your industry made to Congress when it came begging for Federal assistance. In light of your recent decision, we would ask you to please provide answers to the following:

1. For both College Station and Killeen, what specific analysis did United undertake or use to justify ending service on January 3, 2022? Please provide supporting documentation, including future projections for enplanements, load factors, fuel costs, labor shortages, etc.
2. What conversations, if any, has United had with the Department of Transportation about ending service to College Station and Killeen prior to March 1, 2022, the end of the "Minimum Air Services Guarantees" requirements in Public Law 116-260? Please provide copies of any correspondence related to this matter.
3. What conversations, if any, did United have with local officials in College Station or Killeen regarding any underperformance issues prior to deciding to end service to these airports?

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<sup>7</sup> Texas A&M University System Communications Staff, Construction on U.S. army hypersonic test center to begin on Rellis campus this fall Texas A&M Today (2020), <https://today.tamu.edu/2020/05/15/construction-on-u-s-army-hypersonic-test-center-to-begin-on-rellis-campus-this-fall/> (last visited Dec 14, 2021).

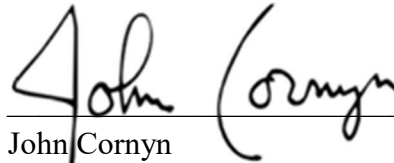
<sup>8</sup> Military OneSource, Fort Hood in-depth overview Military Installations (2021), <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/in-depth-overview/fort-hood> (last visited Dec 14, 2021).

4. Did United ever alert College Station or Killeen that it was possible these cities might lose air service in the future if enplanements or load factors did not improve? If so, when and what was the outcome of those discussions?
5. Did United have any conversations with the Department of Defense (DOD) regarding the decision to end service to Killeen and consequently Fort Hood? If so, to what extent did United and DOD discuss the impact ending service might have on movement of members of the armed forces and their families to and from Fort Hood?
6. Did United discuss, either internally or with key stakeholders including DOD, or otherwise consider the impact ending service to Killeen, and consequently Fort Hood, would have on military readiness and consequently national security? If so, please provide those communications. Additionally, please provide any analysis done weighing national security implications, such as the ability to move service members to and from Fort Hood, against the “long-term sustainability” of this route for United.

Please provide your responses, including any responsive documents to us no later than December 21, 2021. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our staff.



Ted Cruz  
United States Senator



John Cornyn  
United States Senator



Pete Sessions  
Member of Congress



John Carter  
Member of Congress



Roger Williams  
Member of Congress