

U.S. Sens. Baldwin, Duckworth: Reintroduce bill to ensure real-life conditions are considered in federal aircraft emergency evacuation standards

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) to reintroduce the *Emergency Vacating of Aircraft Cabin (EVAC) Act* to ensure the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does more to prioritize passenger safety by appropriately considering carry-on baggage, people with disabilities, seniors and children in its emergency evacuation standards.

The FAA's current standards require that passengers – regardless of age or ability – be able to evacuate aircraft within 90 seconds, but recent simulation tests failed to adequately consider whether a flight is full or mostly empty, has passengers with mobility issues or many other real-life conditions that Americans deal with every time they fly. An identical companion bill was introduced in the House today by Congressman Steve Cohen (D-TN-09), who authored the law that led the FAA to conduct these simulation tests.

“Every American should be able to fly with dignity and peace of mind knowing that safety protocols are in place that take every passenger into account,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “That’s why in the event of an emergency, it’s critical the Federal Aviation Administration considers realistic circumstances like heavy luggage and passengers of different ages, sizes, and abilities when checking evacuation and safety plans are effective. Our legislation will ensure Americans and their loved ones are safe when flying because that is what they demand and deserve.”

“Imagine being on a crowded flight when the worst-case scenario happens: the crew tells you that you have 90 seconds to evacuate—but how can more than 150 passengers on a crowded flight actually safely evacuate in less time than it takes to brush your teeth?” **said Senator Duckworth.** “While we know that aviation is one of the safest ways to travel, we can’t put our heads in the sand and ignore the risks that come with ever-growing numbers of passengers on each individual flight. That’s why Senator Baldwin and I are reintroducing the Emergency Vacating of Aircraft Cabins (EVAC) Act to require the FAA to finally establish evacuation standards that take real-life conditions into account like the presence of carry-on bags, children, seniors and passengers with disabilities. We must act to make flying as safe as we know it can be—and as safe as Americans deserve.”

Recently, the FAA limited in-person simulations to test subjects who were all adults, under age 60, despite that fact that senior citizens, children and persons with disabilities may also be present on a flight. Additionally, [according](#) to CBS News, the tests did not include the presence of obstacles like carry-on baggage that could slow down an evacuation, and were conducted in groups of just 60, while Boeing 737 MAX 8 seating capacity, for instance, ranges from 162 to 178. Then-FAA Administrator Steve Dickson even conceded the tests “provide useful, but not necessarily definitive information...”

Following a [2016 emergency evacuation of an American Airlines 767 at O’Hare](#), the National Transportation Safety Board recommended that FAA conduct further study on the risk posed by carry-on bags during emergency evacuations. That recommendation remains open.

The EVAC Act would direct the FAA to issue a rule establishing evacuation standards that take into account certain real-life conditions including:

1. Passengers of different ages, including young children and senior citizens
2. Passengers of different heights and weights
3. Passengers with disabilities
4. Passengers who do not speak English
5. Passengers who cannot speak, are non-vocal or non-verbal
6. Presence of carry-on luggage and personal items like purses, backpacks and briefcases
7. Seat size and pitch
8. Seat configuration, location and other obstacles in pathway to exit
9. Presence of smoke, darkness or other factors diminishing visibility

This legislation is supported by a broad coalition: Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, Chicago Firefighters Union Local 2, Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA), Transport Workers Union of America (TWU), Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), Allied Pilots Association (APA), Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, FlyersRights.org, AARP, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), National League of Cities, Paralyzed Veterans of America, National Association of the Deaf, World Institute on Disability, Autism Society of America, Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), American Foundation for the Blind, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF), Muscular Dystrophy Association, All Wheels Up, Amputee Coalition, Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, United Spinal Association, ALS Association, Access Ready and American Council of the Blind.

A copy of the bill one-pager can be found [here](#).

“The safety improvements in the EVAC Act are essential and will enhance passenger and crew safety by making aircraft evacuation standards better reflect the reality of emergency evacuations—full aircraft, people of all ages and physical abilities—and it will save lives when seconds count,” **said Ambassador and Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger.**

“As professional pilots, safety will always be our highest priority, and we strongly support the common-sense recommendation that the FAA reevaluate transport-category aircraft evacuation standards,” **said Captain Ed Sicher, president of Allied Pilots Association President.** “The realities of commercial air travel today — including widely differing passenger ages and physical abilities, language barriers, seat pods blocking access across aisles, and ever-shrinking seat size and pitch — all come into play when an evacuation becomes necessary. We applaud Senator Duckworth, Senator Baldwin, and Representative Cohen for taking the lead on this critical safety issue.”

An online version of this release is available [here](#).