

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 23, 2016

Mr. Brandon Belford
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590
Attn: Docket Operations, M-30 West Building Ground Floor, Room W12-140

Dear Mr. Belford,

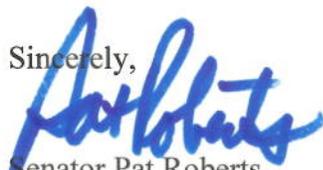
We want to express our support for continued Essential Air Service (EAS) eligibility in rural Kansas at the Great Bend Airport. Following the February 4, 2016, show cause order regarding the proposed termination of EAS in Great Bend, we believe there is sufficient evidence to support reconsideration of EAS eligibility.

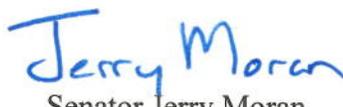
Air service in Great Bend, Kansas has been inconsistent for over two years leading to lower than anticipated utilization rates in the community. In 2014, Great Lakes Airlines abruptly pulled out of the market to be replaced by SeaPort Airlines, which also ended their contract prematurely in January 2016. Data provided by SeaPort and the Great Bend Airport indicates the airline cancelled over 50 percent of all scheduled flights in 2015. With poor and unpredictable service, passenger loads declined more than 77 percent since Great Bend last had consistent service in 2013.

The substandard completion rates of flights to and from Great Bend are largely due to SeaPort's difficulty in securing pilots amid a national pilot shortage. This problem has been exacerbated by changes to FAA regulations regarding pilot experience levels and rest and duty periods. Without pilots, many of the scheduled flights in and out of Great Bend were not completed, leaving potential passengers to cancel trips or utilize other airports instead. We believe this should be taken into consideration before a final determination is reached regarding the future of Great Bend's EAS eligibility.

The Essential Air Service program was originally established to ensure continuous air service to rural communities like western Kansas. The failure of air carriers to meet their contract obligations is principally responsible for the sharp rise in per passenger subsidy at Great Bend Municipal Airport. We respectfully request EAS eligibility be maintained until a carrier can be obtained that will be able to support consistent service to rebuild passenger counts and utilization in Great Bend, Kansas.

Sincerely,


Senator Pat Roberts


Senator Jerry Moran


Congressman Tim Huelskamp