

Southwest Airlines Co.  
Gary C. Kelly  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
2702 Love Field Drive  
Dallas, TX 75235



February 8, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Management and Unions at Southwest Airlines, we respectfully ask your Administration to refrain from imposing any federal mandate to require a pre-departure COVID-19 test for air travel within the United States. We believe such a mandate would be counterproductive, costly, and have serious unintended consequences, including for millions of people who have travel needs but may not have access to testing resources and for the millions of people whose livelihoods depend on a stable air travel industry.

For the past 11 months, Southwest has persevered through the worst health and economic crisis to have ever faced our industry. During this time, the People of Southwest have instituted multiple layers of COVID-19 protections to safeguard our fellow Employees and Customers; transported essential people, equipment, and supplies throughout the United States; and supported the economic resiliency of our Nation. So, now, after 11 months of weathering the COVID-19 storm, we write to express our deep concern about a possible testing mandate for domestic air travel, especially as vaccination rates increase and new cases start to trend downward.

It is important to note that, before the pandemic, Southwest was in the best financial position in its 50-year history. However, since late February 2020, we have seen passenger levels and bookings fall to previously unimaginable lows. We barely avoided actions we have never taken—involuntary furloughs and pay cuts—in an effort to save our Company, thanks in large part to the emergency financial assistance provided by the federal government.

Through it all, the 57,000 People of Southwest Airlines have had the shared priority of keeping our Company in business; keeping our People job secure; and, most of all, keeping everyone in our care safe by adopting the latest in CDC guidelines. In May, we responded to the public health crisis by adopting the *Southwest Promise*—a multi-layered approach to safeguard the health and comfort of our Customers and Employees. Thanks to the *Promise*—including our strict enforcement of our mask policy, our frequent cleaning and disinfecting practices, and the advanced HEPA filtration of cabin air—the onboard environment in each and every one of our airliners presents a low risk of COVID-19 transmission and, importantly, a lower risk than other enclosed spaces in which no federal testing requirement is being contemplated.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.southwest.com/airline-cleanliness-social-distance/>. It is important to underscore that based on analyses performed Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the U.S. Department of Defense's U.S. Transportation Command, Airbus, Boeing, Embraer, IATA, etc., the risk of COVID-19 transmission on an aircraft is less than a typical trip to the grocery store, eating at a restaurant, or riding on a bus or subway car: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/with-proper-precautions-flying-can-be-safer-than-grocery-shopping/>; <https://www.ustranscom.mil/cmd/panewsreader.cfm?ID=C0EC1D60-CB57-C6ED-90DEDA305CE7459D&yr=2020>; <https://community.southwest.com/t5/Blog/Letting-Research-Guide-Our-Southwest-Promise/ba-p/112652>

Moreover, a testing mandate without the underlying resources and technology to facilitate it would lead to more interactions between Customers and Employees—something the *Southwest Promise* is designed to prevent. It would also strain our limited national testing capacity, which is already struggling to meet demand, especially for people of limited means or those in so-called “testing deserts.” Most urgently, a nationwide testing requirement would once again put Southwest jobs at risk, undermining a nearly year-long effort to develop and implement the science-based protocols and procedures that make it possible to continue our operations safely.

At Southwest, we always put People first. We are proudly 85 percent unionized—the highest in the industry. We have never had a layoff, furlough, or pay rate cut. We provide good health care and retirement benefits. And, for the past 50 years, we have led the industry with Customer-friendly policies that make air travel more accessible and affordable for all Americans. We owe it to our Employees and our Customers to push back on any proposed policy that would unnecessarily threaten jobs and eliminate air travel as a viable mode of domestic transportation, especially when such a federal mandate would not apply to other modes of domestic transportation or other enclosed commercial spaces.

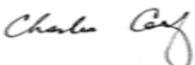
Again, we urge you to consider the impacts of requiring a negative COVID-19 test for domestic air travel would have on our industry, other businesses that rely on commercial air travel, and millions of individuals with real travel needs. Thank you for considering our shared appeal. Our Nation needs your leadership now more than ever.

Sincerely,

Gary C. Kelly



Larry Merchant  
President - Transport Workers Union of America AFL-CIO Local 550



Charles Cerf  
President - Transport Workers Union of America AFL-CIO Local 555



Lyn Montgomery  
President - Transport Workers Union of America AFL-CIO Local 556

*Gerald H. Bradley*



Gerald H. Bradley  
President - Transport Workers Union of America AFL-CIO Local 557

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Capt. Casey Murray  
President - Southwest Airlines Pilots Association

*Bret Oestreich*



Bret Oestreich  
National Director - Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association

*Capt. David Bourne*



Capt. David Bourne  
Director - Airline Division, International Brotherhood of Teamsters

*Robert Clever*



Robert Clever  
President - Local 19 International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Copy to: The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of Transportation  
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security  
Dr. Rochelle Walensky, Director of the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  
Mr. Jeffrey Zients, COVID-19 Recovery Team Coordinator