



Testimony Regarding Use of Hartford-Brainard Airport Site Study.

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Executive Director
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Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee
July 20, 2016

Dear Senator Fonfara, Representative Carpino, Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and distinguished members of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee,

My name is Kevin Dillon, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Airport Authority (CAA). **I am submitting this testimony regarding the Program Review and Investigations Committee study pertaining to the Use of Hartford-Brainard Airport Site.**

As the owner, operator, and FAA-recognized sponsor of Hartford-Brainard Airport, the CAA is responsible for maximizing the airport's development opportunities and harnessing its potential as an economic driver. According to the most recent economic impact study, the economic contribution of Hartford-Brainard Airport totals 368 jobs and \$44.9 million of output, including \$21.3 million of labor income and \$1.4 million in state tax revenues. Both through direct employment at the airport and indirect multiplier effects throughout the region, Brainard Airport is a catalyst for economic development.

In 2015 alone, there were over 52,000 total operations at Hartford-Brainard Airport. The airport has a wide variety of users, from the state's largest employers transporting their executives on time-sensitive business to private pilots enjoying their favorite hobby. These are supported and served by the airport's fixed-base operator, Hartford Jet Center, which provides fueling, ground support, concierge, charter services, and aircraft sales. The airport is also home to aircraft and avionics repair facilities, two flight training schools, hangar and t-hangar rentals, a top-class aviation maintenance vocational school, the Connecticut Wing Civil Air Patrol, rental cars, the Connecticut State Police Central District Headquarters, and a restaurant. It is the base of operations for the Connecticut State Police Aviation Unit, and it is heavily used by Hartford Health Care's Life Star helicopter. This broad constituency of airport users rely on Brainard Airport for their aviation needs, and we are proud of our partnerships with each of them.

Hartford-Brainard Airport is designated as a reliever airport because it provides the business community and private pilots with convenient access to aviation while "relieving" the state's primary commercial service airport, Bradley International Airport, of such general aviation activity. The CAA's general aviation (GA) airport system operates at a loss, as many GA systems do across the country. Despite the CAA achieving GA airport system total revenue growth over 56% from FY12 – FY16 budget, the system currently must be sustained, in part, by a state subsidy from the Special Transportation Fund. As the state subsidy amount has decreased over the past few years, the CAA's general aviation airport system has started experiencing significant financial pressure. However, GA airports like Brainard are oftentimes maintained nationwide notwithstanding their deficits due to the public's interest in aviation and the role that they play on a larger scale. Brainard's status as a reliever airport is a prime example.

Since officially taking over five of the state's general aviation airports in July 2013, the CAA has also tried to serve as a good neighbor to the communities surrounding all of our airports. Just last year, we installed new noise abatement signage at Brainard in some of the airport's most visible areas to encourage pilots to avoid flying over heavily populated areas of nearby towns. We have also partnered with our tenants and other area businesses to support community events, including the events held

by Hartford Jet Center for Brainard Airport's 95th anniversary. This three-day event involved WWII aircraft displays, hot air balloons, a car show, and various other exhibits and activities, with a portion of the proceeds being donated to a local charity. We also stay in touch with area businesses and work to address any concerns or questions that they may have regarding the airport.

Despite the important role of Brainard in the state's aviation system, there have historically been certain parties interested in closing the airport and pursuing private development on the land. This study update does a commendable job summarizing many of the major issues that would arise from such a proposition. From outstanding grant obligations, to restrictive grant assurances that may remain in place from the original purchase of the airport property, to the obligations we have to current tenants who have invested substantial funds in developing airport facilities and whom rely on the airport for their livelihoods, such a path, while understandable from the perspective of the city's economic development interests, should not be pursued lightly. Even if a forced transfer or takeover were to be attempted, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) would not necessarily recognize the acquiring party as the official airport sponsor. Indeed, as noted in the study update, the FAA is very protective of its stake in Brainard Airport and the state's aviation system. If Brainard Airport were to be transferred or closed without addressing the many significant hurdles outlined above, federal funds could be potentially withheld from all state airports and even unrelated transportation projects. Furthermore, the CAA contends that, as the airport and property owner, only the CAA Board of Directors has the authority to determine the future of the airport.

Hartford-Brainard Airport is a state resource, and the CAA has made significant progress developing this valuable asset despite only having gained full authority three years ago. We appreciate the efforts of the committee to help draw attention to this critical piece of Connecticut's transportation infrastructure. We look forward to partnering with the committee and all state stakeholders in an effort to continue improving the airport and bolstering the Hartford region's standing as a place where private pilots can embrace their passion and businesses can conveniently access the skies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please feel free to contact my office at (860) 292-2054 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



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