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Testimony in Support of SB0658: University of Maryland, Baltimore: Study on the Health Effects of Air Traffic Noise

Please vote to fund this bill.

Many other scientific studies that focused on other geographic areas have established that sudden noise from aircraft causes and exacerbates health problems, including poor sleep, stress and anxiety, cardiovascular and metabolic disease, and that this unwanted noise leads to poor learning and impaired job performance. This study will document these effects in the neighborhoods surrounding BWI.

Since the full implementation of the FAA's NextGen program in September 2015, noise bombs have been falling from aircraft flying in straight, concentrated lines at low altitudes, often in neighborhoods previously unaffected by BWI airport noise. The constant barrage of noise has changed our lives for the worse.

At an airport that used to receive only about 300 noise complaints a year, BWI in 2019 received 551,000 noise complaints from citizens living under these new flightpaths, in an over twenty mile radius around BWI. That is an astronomical 183,567% increase. (Q1-112,000. Q2-127,000. Q3-152,000. Q4-160,000.) See <https://marylandaviation.com/environmental/environmental-compliance-sustainability/quarterly-noise-reports/>

These noise complaints document that the FAA's NextGen program has made our lives less healthy and happy, whether or not we are aware of it. I have often talked with neighbors who claim that the noise doesn't bother them, as if that were some badge of strength. However, my good neighbors don't understand that the noise from aircraft does affect their health, whether or not they know it. We can't feel our physiological stress responses, such as our rising blood pressure every two to three minutes when a plane booms and roars overhead. We can't feel the excess cortisol coursing through our bodies and wearing out our organs. We can't correlate our increasing fatigue, short tempers, and lack of concentration with our exposure to noise, but tend to blame other factors in our lives that we think we can better understand.

So this study by Dr. Zafari will document these physiological effects of our exposure to NextGen-caused noise from BWI, but more importantly, it will document its monetary cost.

Let's face it. The FAA and the MAA do not care about human suffering.

They don't care about our noise complaints, except to lament them as bad PR for the airport. The MAA cannot be troubled to distribute their Quarterly Noise Reports to anyone, merely posting them on their website to hide in plain sight. They seem to think that BWI exists to serve the travelers who pass through it, most of whom do not live in Maryland, and to generate corporate profits for the airlines that do not pay for the human suffering that they cause.

The MAA brags about revenues produced by BWI that line the state's coffers. Many citizens worry, irrationally, that any criticism of BWI or any hold on its unbridled expansion will result in lost jobs and lost money for the state. They worry that if we mess with the airport, suddenly they won't be able to catch a cheap flight to Vegas for the weekend to gamble or to attend some distant sports event. However, the dispersion of flightpaths and raising the altitudes of planes as we had before NextGen will have no negative effects on Maryland. Safety has nothing to do with this issue, either. Our airways were safe before NextGen, with no mid-air collision in this country involving a commercial passenger jet since 1978, and our airways will be safe when we revert to previous flight procedures.

Don't be distracted by the complexity of this issue. This proposed study on the health effects of air traffic noise will help document the monetary cost of this noise pollution on our citizens. Money is a language and a value that even the FAA, the MAA, and the airlines understand.

On a personal note: I have lived in my home in Elkridge for 38 years. Before NextGen, I and my family seldom heard or saw a plane. On September 1 of 2015, BWI's runway construction coincided with the full implementation of NextGen, not by coincidence. For 91 consecutive days, I suffered nineteen and a half hours of aircraft noise a day, every two to three minutes, from 5:30 AM to 12:30 AM the next day, with more cargo flights around 3 AM. I could only get five and a half hours of interrupted sleep a day. I would bet dollars to doughnuts that in the affected areas there were citizens who had strokes or heart attacks and died due to stress and sleep deprivation. As documented by the MAA, dB levels reached up to 107, which is nearly loud enough to split one's eardrum. As a result, I now need hearing aids; two audiologists confirmed that I have permanent auditory nerve damage due to exposure to loud noise. Despite this hearing loss, I can no longer open my home's windows. Even though they are triple glazed, I still hear constant aircraft noise inside my well-insulated home. I can no longer

enjoy gardening or the simple pleasure of sitting on my porch and chatting with my neighbors. I do not want to move, and nearly all of Howard County is similarly affected. I want to live close to my children and my grandchildren, so we can help one another.

I have been active in the fight against NextGen-caused aircraft noise from BWI since that noise bombardment of my home, and of hundreds of thousands of other homes, in September 2015. I have been interviewed dozens of times by the Washington Post, the Baltimore Sun, and by local news stations WMAR, FOX, WBJC, and WBAL. I was one of the people who helped bring airnoise.io to our area to make filing noise complaints easy and fast. I uncovered the MAA's failure to maintain its noise monitoring system, which is required by MD law. For many years, starting in 2012 when planning for NextGen began, the MAA published its Quarterly Noise Reports with no noise data whatsoever. I have written hundreds of letters to county, state, and federal officials on this issue. I was an alternate for District 12 on the BWI Roundtable. Fighting for my right to the ordinary use of my home, for my right to health and happiness and on behalf of my community for the last seven years is not how I thought I would be spending my retirement.

As I wrote in an Op-Ed in the Baltimore Sun, "Ragtag resisters fight for peace and quiet near BWI" <https://www.baltimoresun.com/opinion/op-ed/bs-ed-op-0812-air-noise-20190812-d5sf3qsbh5c3jk7q3jp4lr7sgu-story.html>

"Let's let the babies sleep. Let's shield our combat vets who have PTSD triggered from NextGen noise. Let's let our first responders on the night shift get a good day's rest. We need peace."

With the passage of SB0658, let's also document the consequences of the FAA's disastrous NextGen program on the health of the hundreds of thousands of people living around BWI, and the cost of those health consequences in almighty dollars.