

House Environment and Transportation Committee
Testimony in Support of HB 639, Aviation Health and Safety Act

February 19, 2026

I urge the Committee to report favorably HB 639, the Aviation Health and Safety Act. I also suggest a few amendments to improve the bill.

My name is Steve Metalitz. I am a lifelong Marylander and have lived in Silver Spring for the past 30 years. I am also an experienced air traveler, including through BWI Marshall Airport.

I am not a doctor (I am a retired attorney), but it takes no great medical expertise to know that to sit motionless during long airplane flights (of which I have taken many) creates numerous health risks. It stands to reason that these risks are exacerbated when airline passengers must fly in shackles and similar restraints. [This article](#) quotes a forensic pathologist that such practices are “dangerous on so many different levels.”

An increasing number of flights pass through Maryland’s airports carrying people who are shackled and otherwise restrained and thus subject to these serious risks. Some (though not all) of these flights involve the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. In 2025, there were 87 ICE flights from/through BWI; in 2024 there were none.¹

Thus, we face an escalating risk environment for restrained passengers in our airports. If the State can take reasonable steps to reduce these risks and to facilitate response to any medical emergency that could occur, I strongly believe, as a concerned citizen, that it should do so. Furthermore, as a taxpayer, I consider it irresponsible for the State to fail to take these steps and thus expose itself to potentially serious legal liabilities.

The Aviation Health and Safety Act embodies the reasonable risk-reducing steps that are called for. It is carefully crafted to focus on the provision of aviation-related services over which the State has authority, minimizing the risk of federal pre-emption. It requires that the health status of restrained passengers be documented so that if a medical emergency arises, our State’s first responders and medical personnel will be best positioned to offer life-saving care. It specifically requires that restrained passengers be deplaned during refueling of aircraft, when the need for immediate evacuation would otherwise be at its height. In short, it mandates minimally intrusive regulation to protect the health and safety of restrained individuals passing through our airports and to reduce legal risks to the State.

¹ https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ICE-Flight-Monitor-US-Immigration-Enforcement-Flights-Report_Dec2025.pdf

While I strongly urge a favorable report on the legislation, I also suggest a few technical improvements for the Committee's consideration, all relating to the new Section 5-107:

A. Language of Form:

Many detained individuals are not English speakers and cannot be expected to accurately complete a form in English. The Administration should be required to prepare the forms in a range of languages.

B. Number of Forms:

The inspection required should include not only the presence of completed forms on board the aircraft, but also that the number of completed (including waived) forms corresponds to the number of detained individuals on board.

Additionally, the report required in subsection (G) should include the number of completed (including waived) forms on board each aircraft. This will both ensure compliance and also provide transparency into the volume of detained individuals being transported through the airport.

C. Enforcement:

Penalties should be provided for an FBO or aviation service company that fails to conduct an inspection and/or file a report, and, to the extent feasible, for an entity whose flight crew fails to distribute and collect the forms.

D. Scope:

To clarify that the section applies to flights using a Maryland airport other than one operated by the Administration, the definitions of "airport" and "airport facility" in 5-101(f) and (g) should be incorporated by reference.

E. Drafting issues:

- a. Does the "detained individual" definition need to exclude restraints such as seatbelts or child travel seats?
- b. Page 3, line 19: add "and appropriate medical personnel" as persons with whom the forms can be shared (e.g., after the person has been transported to a hospital)
- c. Insert "completed" before "form" on page 3, line 25. (The presence of blank forms is not sufficient.)

Thank you for considering my views on this important legislation.