STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SPACE AND AERONAUTICS
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to outline the Air Line Pilots Association's views on aviation safety and the role we play in protecting the traveling public. ALPA is the world's largest pilot union, representing more than 60,000 pilots who fly for 42 airlines in the U.S. and Canada. ALPA was founded in 1931, and for more than 76 years, ALPA has had a tremendous impact on improving aviation safety. Today, ALPA continues to be the world's leading aviation safety advocate, protecting the safety interests of our passengers, fellow crewmembers, and cargo around the world.

Over the past 10 years, the U.S. aviation industry has seen a 65% decrease in the accident rate, and as a result, the U.S. safety record is the envy of the rest of the world. Much of our success is due to the collaborative approach that has taken place among airline managements, labor, and the FAA in the voluntary collection and analysis of de-identified safety related data. By analyzing recorded data obtained during routine flight operations and receiving written reports from the front line employees in a confidential and non-punitive environment, we can not only see what is happening, but also why it is happening. Today, these stand-alone safety programs at individual airlines are reaching their maturity. That is a reflection of the dynamic nature of any data collection effort – it must adapt to changes in the environment; in this case, the changes in the aviation industry.

As safety professionals continue to see value in these programs and work with them in more detail, it has become clear that even more can be learned by sharing safety information among the various stakeholders in the industry. The FAA and the airline industry, including ALPA, continue to work together on developing a formalized process in which safety information can be accessed through secure networks under mutually agreeable rules of engagement. ALPA has been working closely with the FAA, NASA, and the airlines to develop a process that will make this safety information available to decision makers to help them in their efforts to manage risk. This process is also invaluable in the sharing of accident- and incident-prevention strategies across the industry. Again, though, I would point out that as time goes on, the industry continues to refine our processes for maximizing the safety benefits that the traveling public receives from collecting data while at the same time protecting those employees and airlines that bring the data to the table.

NASA, especially through the Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS) program, has always been an important player in aviation safety. Its human factors research, in particular, has provided great value to our industry. The National Aviation Operational Monitoring Service (NAOMS) survey was part of the early effort to provide more information to help all of us

improve aviation safety. This first survey was a test of the process and methodology. We understand that the data extracted from this survey were summarized and those summaries were shared with the government and industry. As in any first test, the data didn't correlate very well with data from other sources, possibly due to the mix of general aviation and airline operations. The aviation community had plans to further analyze those discrepancies and determine if the data were reliable, but funding for NAOMS ran out. That is when ALPA stepped in to help keep the project alive as a part of our involvement with the Commercial Aviation Safety Team (CAST). While we have been working with CAST to modify the survey, we did not receive any of the collected data from NASA.

What should happen to the data now? Several solutions are available. One that makes a lot of sense is to provide NASA with the necessary resources so that it can complete a peer review of the data and then analyze the data, while at the same time maintain the confidentiality and protective provisions that apply to voluntarily supplied safety information. Other solutions may also exist.

Regardless of the solution, it is important to keep in mind that raw data, distributed without appropriate analysis and scrutiny to ensure its validity, can lead to unintended consequences. Incomplete or inaccurate conclusions can be reached if the collection method is flawed or if people looking at the data aren't familiar with aviation or the context of how that information was provided. No one knows and understands the data better than the stakeholders that provide the data in the first place. That is why it is so important that those stakeholders work closely with the analysts of the data. This will ensure accurate and meaningful conclusions can be reached.

Just as importantly, if raw data are simply distributed to the general public without the quality controls I've mentioned, it would undermine the confidence that pilots and the airline community have that voluntarily and confidentially supplied safety data will remain secure. As an airline captain, and one who represents the safety interests of 60,000 other airline pilots, I'm concerned that this could very well erode the very programs that have driven the excellent safety record of airline travel that the public has come to rely on.

Thank you, again for the opportunity to testify today. I will be pleased to address any questions that you may have.