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June 12, 2008

Paula J. Hammond
Secretary
Washington State Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 47316
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Dear Secretary Hammond:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents more than 414,000 pilots and aircraft owners nationwide and 12,230 who live in Washington State. An important part of AOPA's advocacy for aviation is the protection of America's community airports. On behalf of our members, we strongly urge the State to immediately and continually exercise its authority under the Washington Airport Aid Program Grant Agreement to prevent airport sponsors from abrogating their responsibilities in keeping airports open during the useful life of an improvement project.

Many of the airports that participate in the Washington Airport Aid Program are not part of the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), and as such, are not eligible for federal aid, or required to remain open by federal grant obligations. However, the Washington State program's Terms and Conditions require airport sponsors to keep recipient airports open to the flying public throughout the useful life of the facilities developed with program funding. Including this requirement was a wise decision by the creators of the program, and provides you today with a powerful tool in protecting the State's investment in these airports as a vital part of Washington's transportation system

AOPA is aware of at least two airports that are in the process of trying to get out of their obligations to the State by closing the airport prior to the end of the useful life of their projects. Blaine Municipal Airport and Vista Field have developers hovering around them waiting to turn these useful general aviation airports into commercial developments.

We encourage the State to take immediate action to exercise their existing authority and strongly enforce the existing grant agreements with these airport sponsors to maintain and keep these airports open. In doing so, the State's actions would help to deter any future sponsors from taking the same misguided actions. Time is of the essence if we are to protect these vital transportation assets, and your tough stance on this issue is of vital importance to our members and to the future of general aviation in Washington.

Thank you for your prompt action on this issue. We stand ready to assist you with this important and critical task. In the meantime, should you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. You may also wish to contact Mr. John Collins, who can be reached at 301-695-2119

Sincerely,

Andrew V. Cebula
Executive Vice President
Government Affairs