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July 8, 2026

The Honorable Mikie Sherrill
Governor of New Jersey
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: New Jersey General Aviation Industry Under Threat

Governor Sherrill,

I am writing to you on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of members of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), including nearly six thousand in New Jersey, to raise our concerns about a vital resource in your state. General aviation airports across New Jersey are under increasing threat of closure from a lack of protection, limited funding, and misguided perceptions. Your leadership and action are needed to preserve these important public transportation and economic assets.

AOPA has been working closely with stakeholders throughout the state, representing the pilot community, airports, flight schools, and other related businesses. The closure of airports put these businesses, and the jobs they support, in jeopardy, and deny the residents' access to transportation, business and economic development, public safety, and emergency services, as well as training opportunities. As a pilot yourself, you understand the majesty of taking flight, and that it is a shame to put access to that dream further out of reach for New Jersey residents. Therefore, we request that you meet with representatives of New Jersey's general aviation industry to discuss the critical role that our state's public-use airports play and take action to protect the statewide network.

General aviation airports are vital transportation assets that provide access to national and international networks and the ability to connect people and businesses with goods and services, including healthcare. They serve at the forefront of national preparedness as staging points during both manmade and natural disasters and as rallying points during times of national crisis. According to the 2016 New Jersey Statewide Economic Impact Study, general aviation in New Jersey generates more than \$2.8 billion in economic activity, supports approximately 13,000 jobs, and contributes more than \$896 million in income to the state's economy.

Despite their tremendous value, action is needed to protect the state's system. Across New Jersey, developers continue to seek opportunities to encroach upon airport boundaries and influence municipal planners with promises of future tax base expansion. At the same time, airports face increasing threats from incompatible land use, airspace hazards, and a lack of dedicated state funding. Trinca Airport (13N) in Sussex County closed in 2020 as the last municipally owned grass airfield in the state. Flying W Airport (14N) in Lumberton, NJ, is

being sold to developers and will eventually displace more than 40 aircraft and businesses. Solberg Airport (N51)—a woman-owned business in Readington—is under threat of inverse condemnation as the township seeks to impose airport safety zoning laws that restrict airport operations and prohibit the use of long-established infrastructure—exactly the opposite of how the state intended airport safety zoning to be used. If Readington were allowed to cement this zoning ordinance, it would establish a precedent across New Jersey that allows every municipality to discriminate against these long-established public-use airports and private businesses.

According to NJDOT, the state had 82 public-use airports in 1950. Today, there are only 40 public-use airports, with more losses expected. Unique to New Jersey is a high concentration of privately owned, public-use airports that make up 58% of the state's entire airport system, with 23 such airports. Like Solberg and Flying W, another of these unique airports is Andover/Aeroflex (12N), a less than 2,000-foot paved strip that is privately owned by the State Forest Fire Service. Unfortunately, due to a lack of recapitalization funding, the Fire Service is preparing to demolish the airport's only hangars and only rebuild a single hangar for itself. The renowned flight school Andover Flight Academy—another woman-owned business known for specialized tailwheel instruction—uses only antique fabric aircraft that must be stored indoors. Additionally, the local maintenance facility must be able to service aircraft indoors. Inevitably, the loss of these hangars will result in the closure of both businesses. Beyond the immediate loss of jobs and income, the flight school accounts for approximately 90% of airport operations and more than 80% of the airport's fuel sales, purchasing more than 2,000 gallons each month. Intentionally or not, the Fire Service's plan will only serve to diminish the airport as a public-use facility. But with your leadership, we can prevent this loss.

A meeting with leaders from New Jersey's general aviation community would provide an opportunity to discuss these challenges and explore ways to strengthen protections for our airports, preserve their economic contributions, and ensure that they remain available to serve the needs of New Jersey residents for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your commitment to serving the people of New Jersey.

Sincerely,



Leon Jackler,
Vice President
Airport and State Advocacy
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
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Cc:

The Honorable Dale Caldwell,
Lieutenant Governor, New Jersey

Commissioner Ed Potosnak,
Department of Environmental Protection

Commissioner Priya Jain,
Department of Transportation

Assistant Commissioner John Cecil,
State Parks, Forests, and Historic Sites

Ms. Kimbrali Davis,
Executive Manager, Bureau of Aeronautics

Chief William Donnelly,
State Forest Fire Service

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