United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 9, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski, Ranking Member Shelby, Chairman Murray and Ranking Member Collins:

As you finalize negotiations on the fiscal year 2014 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to include language ensuring full and dedicated funding for the Contract Tower Program as part of the fiscal year 2014 budget for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Full and dedicated funding for the Contact Tower Program is critical to ensuring that operations continue throughout the fiscal year at the 252 Federal Aviation Administration contract towers across the country. Restricting the operations of contract towers would have a substantial and serious impact on general aviation safety, the efficiency of large commercial airports, emergency medical operations, law enforcement, agriculture activities and small businesses throughout the United States.

In response to mandatory sequestration cuts in 2013, FAA proposed to eliminate funding for 149 contract towers in the program, a disproportional cut that far exceeded the reductions to most areas of the agency's budget. If implemented, this dramatic cut and the closure of the identified towers would have increased traffic at the remaining contract and FAA-operated towers and hindered the safety and integrity of general aviation operations.

The contract tower program is one of the FAA's most cost-effective programs. Contract towers handle approximately 28 percent of the nation's air traffic control tower operations but they account for only 14 percent of the FAA's total tower operations budget. Additionally, the

average contract tower operates at one-third the cost of a federal control tower, though it is held to the same standard of excellence.

Providing full and dedicated funding language for the Contract Tower Program is necessary to ensure FAA appropriately treats the program as it manages the budgetary constraints of the coming fiscal year. It will provide certainty to local communities and protect this important and long-standing aviation safety program from being targeted for disproportionate cuts or elimination of service at certain airports.

Contract towers have played a central role for the past 30 years in efforts to manage the safety and efficiency of our nation's complex airspace. We look forward to working with you to ensure its future success.

Sincerely,

James M. Inhofe
United States Senator

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator