August 16, 2005

Administrator Edmund S. Hawley
Transportation Security Administration
East Building 601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 22202-4220

Administrator Hawley:

I am writing on behalf of the 46,000 women and men of the Association of Flight Attendants – CWA (AFA-CWA), AFL-CIO to express concerns over recent press reports of proposed changes to aviation security procedures. We sincerely hope that you will consider our concerns as the front line security professionals onboard commercial aircraft in this country.

I know that I need not remind you Administrator Hawley that it was flight attendants who were the first to lose their lives on September 11th and who today remain the first line of defense against any terrorist attack onboard an airborne aircraft.

Since assuming your responsibilities at TSA I have not had the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss the important security role flight attendants play onboard commercial aircraft. We fulfill this role, while our pilot colleagues are safely behind barricaded flightdeck doors and in some cases armed, with fewer and fewer flights staffed by Federal Air Marshals and we are still without consistent and adequate flight attendant security training due to the failure of TSA to act on Congressional mandates.

It is particularly distressing in light of our post September 11 responsibilities that we had to learn of these proposed screening changes through press reports rather than through a consultation with the TSA. We have repeatedly tried to develop a working relationship with your predecessors at TSA that would recognize the value of our insight as front line aviation employees. Unfortunately, time and time again we learn of proposed changes after the fact and our input and advice is never sought out or considered. This time appears to be no different.

While we were not given the opportunity to provide our unique perspective on these changes, I will nevertheless share our point of view in the hopes that serious consideration will be given to our concerns. I am encouraged that the agency will reportedly attempt to increase screening for potential suicide bombers. I know that we agree that such a threat is very likely and there should be additional focus on screening and detecting such an individual. However, we are troubled that some potentially dangerous weapons such as knives, ice picks, throwing stars and bows and arrows will reportedly be allowed onboard the aircraft. Again, as the front line personnel with little or no effective security training or means of self defense, such weapons could prove fatal to our members. They may not assist in breaking through a flightdeck door, but they could definitely lead to the deaths of flight attendants and passengers.

INFLIGHT SAFETY PROFESSIONALS
We all agree that the goal of a terrorist is to terrorize the public and instill fear in our everyday lives. Even a plane that is attacked and results in only a few deaths would seriously jeopardize the progress we have all made in restoring the confidence of the flying public. We urge you to reconsider allowing such dangerous items – which have no place in the cabin of an aircraft in the first place – to be introduced into our workplace.

We are also concerned about the reported proposed changes that would allow pilots to bypass security screening entirely. Why are pilots singled out as the only crewmember that will be exempt from security screening? You may not be aware of it Administrator Hawley, but flight attendants are subjected to the same level of screening and background checks as pilots, with the exception of those pilots participating in the FFDO program. So, we would be interested to know exactly why pilots are the only airline employee group that will bypass security screening at the airport with enactment of the reported changes. If you are looking to reduce wait time for passengers, I will remind you that there are many more flight attendants heading through the security screening lines than there are pilots. We fail to comprehend TSA’s logic in only exempting this one employee group.

AFA has been consistent in our support of the careful screening of every person entering the aircraft. We are confident that there is a way to accommodate both the needs of all flight crew to reach planes in a timely manner without excessive or intrusive screening experiences and the need to ensure that every person entering every aircraft has been thoroughly screened. It would only take one compromised pilot, flight attendant or other airline employee with access to the aircraft and ability to bypass screening to once again bring down a plane full of passengers.

As we have testified to Congress, there is a crying need for TSA to devote serious resources to the development of a transportation workers identification credential that will promote expedited screening of those who most frequently must pass through airport security. This credential could employ biometrics, such as fingerprints, to get flight attendants and others through quickly. We aren’t suggesting that physical screening of either pilots or flight attendants be abandoned once such a credential is developed, but rather that both have a part to play in developing a layered security system that can protect against catastrophic attack. Such a layered security system has been recommended by the 9-11 Commission Staff as key to ensuring that a single-point failure in the system is not catastrophic.

Again Administrator Hawley, we are once again disappointed that TSA has chosen to ignore the concerns and insight of our nation’s over 100,000 flight attendants. We hope that you will take seriously the concerns I have expressed in this letter and amend the proposed changes accordingly. I am of course available to discuss these concerns with you in person, as I have always been.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Patricia A. Friend
International President