PETITION CALLS FOR AIRLINE SEAT STANDARDS TO END THE CABIN CRUSH

News / Airlines

With commercial airlines packing more passengers per plane, many fliers believe that the federal government should adopt minimum airline seat standards for legroom and width to ensure the safety and comfort of travelers.

That is the sentiment of more than 30,000 people who signed a petition that was sent last month to Federal Aviation Administration chief Michael Huerta.

The petition, circulated by the passenger rights group FlyersRights.org, points out that many airlines have installed narrower seats with less legroom to boost capacity. It asks the FAA to put a moratorium on any further reduction in seat space and to appoint a panel to come up with minimum seat standards.

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"The shrinkage of seats and passenger space by airlines to generate higher profits while the size of passengers has substantially increased has created an intolerable crisis situation," according to the petition. "It is threatening the health, safety and comfort of all passengers."

The FAA said it would review the petition on seat standards in an "appropriate time frame."

The U.S. Department of Transportation does not impose any standards for seat legroom, width or comfort. Instead, the federal government allows airlines to put as many seats in a cabin as the companies want as long as the passengers have enough room to escape in an emergency within 90 seconds.

Airlines for America, a trade group for the airline industry, has rejected the idea of legroom and seat width standards.

"We also believe that government should not regulate airline seat sizes, but instead market forces and competition should determine what is offered," said Jean Medina, a spokeswoman for the airline group.

An advisory panel to the Transportation Department met this week but did not recommend seat standards. Instead the Advisory Committee for Aviation Consumer Protection asked the federal agency to urge airlines to disclose their seat dimensions on their websites.

During the meeting, panel member and travel expert Charles Leocha said he was troubled that the government has adopted minimum space requirements for dogs traveling on airplanes but not for humans.

"I was very disappointed that we didn't come up with a committee recommendation on personal space on aircraft," Leocha said, adding that he supports the Flyersrights.org petition.

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